Hafa Adai!

# Saipan Tribune

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services personnel scope Hidden Beach from nearby cliff lines in search of missing swimmer Traven Quitugua.

# Man drowns off Hidden Beach

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Department of Public Safety officers scope the waters off the coast of Hidden Beach in search of Traven Quitugua, a local male who drowned while spearfishing with a companion.

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A man has drowned off the coast of Hidden Beach yesterday, marking the CNMI's first drowning incident of the year.

Twenty-two-year-old Traven Quitugua reportedly drowned while spearfishing with a companion. He was pronounced dead at the Commonwealth Health Center.

First responders immediately launched a search-and-rescue

*See MAN on Page 4*

# 'Immediate action may be needed for strays that present a public danger'

Manibusan

» **House passes animal euthanasia bill; AG says no legal issues with the bill, but some policy implications should be considered**

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

As the CNMI attempts to control and ultimately eradicate the feral dog population, there may be a need to take immediate action on stray animals that present

*See ACTION on Page 4*

# Hotel occupancy at 30% in November 2023

The Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands reported 30% average occupancy rate among its 11 member-hotels for November 2023, compared to 22% average occupancy among 13 hotels in November 2022.

A total of 20,681 of 69,444 available room nights sold during November 2023, compared to 15,625 of 72,264 available rooms sold in November 2022. Average room rates were $128.99 compared to $139.53 last November.

"The month of Novem-

*See HOTEL on Page 4*

# New Year's Day quake in Japan revives trauma of 2011 triple disasters

By HIRO KOMAE and ELAINE KURTENBACH
Associated Press

**SUZU, Japan (AP)**—The powerful earthquake that shattered the peace of New Year's Day in central Japan did not spur massive tsunamis like those that scoured the

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A person looks at a body of a family member found from a collapsed house caused by powerful earthquake in Suzu, Ishikawa Prefecture Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024. AP

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Saipan Fitbeat Lions Club held its 2nd Annual Year-End Party with a theme "Saddle Up and Put Your Boots On, Wild Wild West."
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# Local

## Firefighters' union asks CPA for info in order to start CBA negotiations

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Commonwealth Ports Authority's Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting Building.

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The Northern Marianas Professional Firefighters Union IAFF-Local 5335 has asked the Commonwealth Ports Authority to provide the union with specific details on what information CPA needs in satisfying its concerns regarding collective bargaining agreement negotiations.

NMPFU IAFF-Local 5335 president Paul B. Sasamoto inquired in a recent letter to CPA executive director Leo B. Tudela as to what specific information is needed so they may officially begin CBA negotiations.

Sasamoto, who is a Fire captain, made the inquiry after receiving a letter from Tudela that he will not engage in CBA negotiations until all CPA's concerns are addressed.

The union president said Tudela also urged the NMPFU IAFF-Local 5335 to contact the National Labor Relations Board for assistance.

In response, Sasamoto told Tudela: "Please be advised that NLRB does not have jurisdiction over government agency employees but rather the private sector in dealing with labor and employee relations."

The union president requested Tudela to provide an official response within 14 days from the date his (Sasamoto) letter.

He also asked for a specific date to meet so that they can coordinate the time with the IAFF-10th District Negotiation Team for an initial meeting.

NMPFU IAFF-Local 5335 members currently consist of 25 personnel from the CPA's Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting division and 78 personnel from the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services.

## CMS opposes Saipan Mayor's Office motion to dismiss suit

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
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REPORTER

Construction & Material Supply Inc. is opposing Saipan Mayor Ramon B. Camacho's request to dismiss the lawsuit CMS filed against him and the Saipan Mayor's Office.

CMS, which is suing Camacho in his official capacity as mayor, as well as the Saipan Mayor's Office, over alleged nonpayment of quarry fees, has filed an opposition to Camacho's motion for dismissal.

In Camacho's motion to dismiss the CMS' suit, his lawyer, Michael Evangelista, argues that Saipan is not a chartered municipality that could be subjected to a lawsuit, hence Camacho cannot be sued for damages in his official capacity.

In its opposition, CMS attorneys Robert T. Tenorio and Oliver M. Manglona argue that the court has jurisdiction over the dispute, regardless whether Saipan is a chartered municipality or not.

"The Saipan municipality has the legal capacity to enter into a contract independently, and cannot bind the central government to its liabilities. In addition, the municipality is a third-party beneficiary only as to the benefits actually consented to by the Department of Public Lands—free raw quarry materials of up to 100 cubic yards in 2023. Defendants received processed quarry materials in excess of 100 cubic yards in 2023, which was beyond and not part of DPL's consent agreement, and should be liable for breach of contract," said CMS' attorneys.

Camacho

Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph N. Camacho will hear the parties' arguments on Jan. 30, at 2:30pm.

CMS is suing the Office of the Mayor and Camacho to collect on $36,126.25 that it said represents unpaid material that exceed the community benefit agreement required by its Temporary Occupancy Agreement.

CMS, a quarry operator at the Kannat Tabla quarry, is asking the Superior Court to compel Camacho and the Saipan municipality to pay $36,126.25, along with the legal costs associated with the lawsuit.

CMS explained in their lawsuit that the amount had reached this sum after Camacho and the Saipan Mayor's Office not only received base course material that exceeded the 100 cubic yards approved by DPL under the public benefit requirement of its permit, but the mayor's office also ordered 7.5 cubic yards of aggregates—parts of which constituted processed material. These aggregates, CMS said, are not included in the public benefit agreement, and all agencies must pay for this material.

The CMS lawsuit was filed on Oct. 18, 2023, by CMS and their lawyer, Robert Torres.

# SNILD OKs re-appointment of Palacios to Cannabis Commission

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

The Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation has confirmed the re-appointment of Jose Borja Palacios to serve on the CNMI Cannabis Commission board.

All 18 SNILD members present at a session last Thursday adopted the SNILD Judiciary and Governmental Operations Committee's report that recommends the confirmation of Palacios.

Palacios, who will represent Saipan and Northern Islands on the Cannabis Commission board, will serve a four-year term which will expire on Sept. 11, 2027.

Before confirming Palacios, Christine Fitial, communication specialist under the Office of the Governor, extended the administration's appreciation and gratitude to acting SNILD chairman Rep. Roman Benavente (Ind-Saipan), as well as to SNILD Judiciary and Governmental Operations Committee chaired by Senate President Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) and members for the time and effort they've all put into reviewing and examining the nominee.

"The administration asks for your favorable consideration. Your untiring effort on entertaining the nominee is just a step forward as the administration completes the vacancies for all boards and commissions," Fitial said.

After the confirmation, Jose Palacios took oath of office before Gov. Arnold I. Palacios in the governor's conference room.

Jose Palacios is a distant uncle to Gov. Palacios.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Newly confirmed CNMI Cannabis Commission board member Jose Borja Palacios poses with Gov. Arnold I. Palacios after the swearing in ceremony in the governor office's conference room last Thursday. Also in the photo are Jose Palacios' children, grandchildren, and other family members.

In re-appointing Jose Palacios last September, Gov. Palacios said he and Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang are confident that the nominee will devote his time and efforts to carry out the regulatory mandates of the Cannabis Commission for the successful implementation and enforcement of the Taulamwarr Sensible Cannabis Act of 2018.

# Man who pleaded guilty to bribery ordered to pay a fine

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A man who previously pleaded guilty to bribery involving a Division of Fish and Wildlife employee was ordered to pay a fine Superior Court Associate Judge Kenneth L. Govendo ordered Ji Jing Borja last week to pay a fine of $500 for his involvement in a bribery scheme with Fish and Wildlife employee, Marvin Rodney Pangelinan. In addition to the fine, Borja must pay a court fee of $25 by Feb. 22.

Govendo

Borja previously pleaded guilty to offering, receiving and soliciting gifts or favors on Dec. 21, 2023.

Borja's co-defendant, Pangelinan, was ordered to pay a $500 fine and a court cost of $25.

On July 13, 2023, Pangelinan pleaded guilty to charges of solicitation or receipt of money for advice or assistance.

According to court documents, Borja paid Pangelinan $100 so that Borja could run his business at the Grotto without proper documentation as required under CNMI law.

Borja operates and/or is employed by Blue Ocean Tinian Corp., the holder of a CNMI business license to operate as a scuba diving tour operator on Tinian.

However, court documents state that on Feb. 12, 2023, Blue Ocean or Borja did not have a business license to operate as a scuba diving tour operator on Saipan, nor did it, or Borja, possess a water sports permit issued by the CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality's Division of Coastal Resources Management.

Despite not having either a valid business license or water sports permit, Borja brought a group of tourists to the Grotto to go scuba diving.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

*Bellisima* is a nine-day Japanese cruise that starts off at Yokohama with its stop overs being Guam and then Saipan before heading back up to Yokohama.

# *Bellisima* to visit Saipan today

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Saipan community is set to see the arrival of Japan-based cruise ship *Bellisima,* which is expected to bring in thousands of tourists to the CNMI.

Although the last few months have been slow in terms of Japanese tourism, numbers are expected to pick up with *Bellisima* making a port call today.

According to the Commonwealth Ports Authority, *Bellisima* is expected to dock at the Port of Saipan at around 8am today.

Meanwhile, members of the CNMI community, including agencies like the Marianas Visitors Authority, the Saipan Chamber of Commerce, the Hotel Association of the NMI, and more are expected to hold a welcoming ceremony for the ship's passengers.

*Bellisima* is a nine-day Japanese cruise that starts off at Yokohama with its stop overs being Guam and then Saipan before heading back up to Yokohama.

The cruise left Yokohama on Dec. 30, with its passengers celebrating the New Year near the Northern Islands.

**COMMONWEALTH UTILITIES CORPORATION**
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**INVITATION FOR BIDS**
**CUC-IFB-24-002**

**AGINGAN WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT IMPROVEMENTS**

The Office of the Executive Director, Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed bids from qualified firms for the Construction of Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The work consists of furnishing all labor, supervision, equipment, materials and supplies for the construction of various improvements within the Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) for the project referred to as the AGINGAN WWTP IMPROVEMENTS, Saipan, CNMI under Project No. S18-065 and Project No. S20-079.

The work generally includes, but is not limited to:

**Project No. S18-065**
Installation of the owner-furnished primary screen within 120 calendar days after Notice to Proceed is issued. Additionally, replacement of the clarifier drive; rehabilitation of the headworks includes replacement of the weir gates to stop gate, a ½-ton hand crank hoist/crane; clarifier bypass; electrical service rehabilitation, replacement of the existing Motor Control Center (MCC), installation of a generator automatic transfer switch (ATS) and digester decanter improvements. The work shall be done in accordance with Project No. S18-065 Plans and Specifications.

**Project No. S20-079**
Provision of temporary facilities including bypass pumping; furnishing and installing new Vortex Grit Removal Equipment and headworks slide gates, which will require demolition of certain elements within and improvements to the existing headworks channel and deck area; replacement of the existing surface aerator equipment in the North/South Aeration Tanks and Aerobic Digester Tank with a new surface aerator equipment which will require modifications to the existing concrete tank structures; replacement of existing pipe supports for the Aeration Basin influent piping; associated electrical, instrumentation, and control improvements; demobilization; and all other work described in Project No. S20-079 Plans and Specifications.

The work shall be done without disruption to the daily operation of the wastewater system.

CUC requires the Project to be completed within 820 calendar days from the date of the award of contract.

***The project is funded by a grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The award of this project is contingent upon receipt of approval for project award from USEPA.***

Prospective Bidders for this IFB must pre-register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division. The Bid Package may be obtained from the CUC Procurement and Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, Saipan, between 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on government observed holidays, upon completion of registration and presentation of a receipt evidencing a non-refundable payment to the CUC Treasury Section, by cash, check or credit card in the amount of $200.00 (non-refundable) for one IFB package set.

A Pre-Bid Conference followed by a Site Visit is scheduled on **December 27, 2023 at 10:00 AM (ChST)** at the CUC Main Conference Room, 3rd Floor, Room No.17, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building.

**One (1) original and Five (5) hard copies** must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "**CUC-IFB-24-002, Agingan Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements",** to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, **no later than 10:00 AM (ChST) on January 18, 2024,** at which time they will be publicly opened and read aloud. Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered. Bid shall be submitted on the provided Bid Forms. Bidders are required to complete all Bid Forms. Bidders may supplement the form as appropriate. Bids will be required to be submitted under a condition of irrevocability for a period of 60 days after submission. **Late submissions and conditional bids will not be considered.**

All bidders are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the bidders due to lack of information or understanding of the bid requirements in the course of Contractor's preparation of a bid under the contract.

A *Bid Guarantee* of not less than fifteen (15%) percent of the total bid price must accompany the bids. The bid guarantee may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or bid bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States, Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful bidder. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). *Bidders are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.*

All bidders are required to comply with all CNMI and applicable Federal Laws. This bid and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

All questions or request for clarification regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than **10:00 (ChST) on December 28, 2023** to Mr. Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Administrator, via email at manny.sablan@cucgov.org with a copy to Mr. Larry Manacop, Acting Chief Engineer – via email at larry.manacop@cucgov.org, and Marcela Tenorio, Procurement & Supply, Senior Administrative Technician – via email at marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all bids and waive any imperfection in the bid proposal in the best interest of the government. All bids shall become the property of CUC.

BETTINA G. TERLAJE
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Administrator

## QUAKE

*From page 1*

Pacific coast in 2011, killing nearly 20,000 people and forcing tens of thousands of people from their homes.

The tsunamis that did roll in along the Sea of Japan, on Japan's western coast, were mostly just a few feet high, rather than waves up to 5 meters (15 feet) tall predicted in alerts issued just after the magnitude 7.6 quake struck on Monday afternoon.

But the alarms and evacuation orders, and the dozens of strong quakes that came before and after the main quake on Monday, summoned memories of the triple disasters nearly 13 years ago. ,

As of Wednesday morning, local officials said 62 people were confirmed killed in the quake that struck on the coast of the remote Noto peninsula, 300 kilometers (about 185 miles) northwest of Tokyo.

Searchers were combing through rubble, a task lent urgency by forecasts for heavy rain that could trigger more landslides and collapses, racing against the clock to find survivors. Some were buried in landslides or trapped in houses whose roofs collapsed. Firefighters were using power saws to access people trapped in a small, 7-floor apartment building that fell sideways off its foundation.

"Hardly any homes are standing. They're either partially or totally destroyed," said Masuhiro Izumiya, the mayor of Suzu city, which suffered heavy damage.

Two days after the quake, a man watched silently, wiping his eyes with a towel, as rescuers pulled his wife's body from beneath their collapsed home.

The quake struck on the one day of the year that nearly all Japanese take off: The New Year holiday is the country's biggest festival, when families gather to sit in heated "kotatsu" tables, eat "osechi" delicacies and rice cakes, and just take it easy.

The calm was vanquished by TV announcers who urgently and repeatedly warned people in areas that might be flooded to seek higher ground, without delay.

Tens of thousands of people living in areas near where the quake struck sought shelter in government buildings and schools as authorities warned against returning to buildings possibly weakened by dozens of strong aftershocks.

Others lined up patiently to get drinking water from tanker trucks sent in to help tide residents over until broken pipes could be fixed.

"It's flattened (my house) so we can't get inside. So I'm here with my wife sleeping together in a huddle while talking to others and encouraging each other. That's the situation now." said Yasuo Kobatake, who was visiting his hometown in Suzu when quake occurred.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and other officials sternly warned against posting misleading or "malicious" information online after some people posted videos of the gigantic 2011 tsunami as if it was from Monday's quake.

The disaster was an inauspicious start for 2024. According to Asian astrology, it's a Dragon Year that usually would bring good luck and prosperity. So far, it's brought a quake on Monday and a fiery landing of a Japan Airlines plane in Tokyo on Tuesday after a Japan Airlines flight from the northern island of Hokkaido crashed into a smaller Japan Coast Guard aircraft on the runway. All 379 passengers and crew of the JAL plane escaped. Five people perished on the smaller plane, which had been preparing to deliver relief supplies for quake victims.

The holiday's celebrations turned somber: Kishida postponed plans for a ceremonial New Year visit to the Ise Shrine. Public visits to the Imperial Palace in Tokyo for New Year greetings by the Imperial family were canceled as Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako conveyed their sympathies to victims of the disaster.

The damage is much smaller in scale than in 2011, but still catastrophic.

The Noto area is renowned for old, picturesque wooden-frame homes and shops, often with heavy tile roofs that experts say are most vulnerable to the kind of violent shaking seen in Monday's quake. Most, but not all, of Japan's modern buildings are built to stronger, quake-resistant specifications, usually using reinforced concrete that tends to hold up well.

Much of the damage from Monday's quake to more modern buildings appears to have resulted from landslides and subsidence, which severely damaged homes even 100 kilometers (60 miles) away in Kanazawa, the closest larger city.

Landslides and road collapses left some isolated communities cut off: Residents in Suzu used folding chairs, benches and other things to spell out SOS in a parking lot—much as some distressed quake and tsunami survivors did in 2011.

The 2011 triple disasters along Japan's northeastern coast began with a magnitude 9 earthquake offshore that was more than 125 times more powerful than this week's quake in terms of the total energy it released, according to an online calculating tool of the U.S. Geological Survey. It unleashed tsunami with waves up to 40 meters (131 feet) high that pounded into the coast, across sea walls and up river valleys, wiping out entire communities in low-lying areas.

It also triggered meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant that led to massive evacuations along the coast due to worries over radiation escaping from the disabled plant that have kept thousands from moving back.

The operator of the nuclear power plant closest to the epicenter of Monday's quake, in Shika, said there were minor problems and damage, but nothing that would cause radiation leaks from the facility, where reactors were idled for safety checks.

Hokuriku Power apologized for quake-related power outages that affected 33,200 homes in the area—some of those who sought refuge said they were too cold without any heating due to the blackouts, with temperatures dipping near freezing overnight.

Further north, at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant in Niigata prefecture, the world's largest atomic power plant by power capacity, the quake caused water to spill from fuel pools of two reactors. Its operator Tokyo Electric Power, which also is responsible for the wrecked Fukushima plant, said there was no damage or leaks.

TEPCO recently gained permission to restart the Niigata facility, which had been partially shut down at the time of the 2011 quake and has been undergoing safety improvements since that disaster, which did not affect it.

## MAN

*From page 1*

operation yesterday soon after receiving a report of the incident. Joining yesterday's search were the Department of Public Safety, Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Although first responders managed to locate and rescue Quitugua, he was unresponsive and was pronounced dead at CHC after being rushed there.

According to statement from DPS and DFEMS, dispatch received a call yesterday at around 8:55am about a drowning incident at Hidden Beach along Route 36 in Talafofo.

At approximately 9:04am, officers arrived at the beach and learned that two men had gone out spearfishing when one of them, Quitugua, had drowned and was still underwater.

DFEMS arrived shortly after, with other first responders arriving at the scene at around 9:09am.

Officers learned from the victim's fishing male companion, Anthony King, that they had both decided to go fishing that morning. At approximately 8am, both men arrived at Hidden Beach and proceeded into the water to spearfish.

King told police that, after about 30-45 minutes, he surfaced and noticed that Quitugua's speargun was floating, but he was nowhere in sight. The witness proceeded to free dive back down in the water and saw the victim's body on the sea floor.

King told police that he attempted to retrieve the victim and pull him out of the water, but the waves were too strong. That's when he proceeded to swim to shore and called for help.

Responding DFEMS and DPS personnel immediately took to nearby cliff lines for an aerial view of the ocean. At approximately 9:18am, the DPS boat was launched out of Smiling Cove to respond to the incident. Upon arriving at the scene, three Boating Safety divers jumped into the waters and did an underwater search for Quitugua.

At around 10:33am, during a pattern search, the U.S. Coast Guard HSC 25 helicopter and DPS boat were able to locate and recover the unresponsive Quitugua from the water and he was immediately transported to Smiling Cove and brought to CHC, where he was pronounced dead shortly after.

## HOTEL

*From page 1*

ber was tough," said acting HANMI chair Dennis Seo. "The temporary suspension of Asiana Airlines' flights from Seoul throughout the month was one of factors that froze the recovery of visitor arrivals and tourism. Winter holiday peak season beginning mid-December will help, but it is still very clear that for full recovery, the Marianas needs market diversification, a third major source market to augment Korea and Japan."

Hotels included in HANMI's monthly statistical report are Aqua Resort Club, Aquarius Beach Tower, Century Hotel, GrandVrio Resort Saipan, Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan, Hyatt Regency Saipan, Kanoa Resort Saipan, Kensington Hotel Saipan, Saipan World Resort, Surfrider Resort Hotel, and Pacific Islands Club Saipan.

HANMI was established in 1985 as a professional forum for the hospitality industry of the Marianas. HANMI also makes regular charitable donations to support non-profit organizations and tourism-related government projects. ***(HANMI)***

## ACTION

*From page 1*

a danger to the public and are injured and suffering, and are near death or cannot be cured, or are abandoned, said Attorney General Edward Manibusan.

He noted that several states allow for "emergency" euthanasia for law enforcement officers, animal control agents, or veterinarians to take immediate action under emergency conditions.

He said House Bill 23-34 emphasizes the importance of providing a humane option to euthanize animals in the Commonwealth.

"There are no apparent legal issues with this bill. However, some policy implications should be considered," said Manibusan in his written comments on House Bill 23-34.

He said the bill brings uniformity to laws surrounding the disposition of animals.

Authored by Rep. Edwin K. Propst (D-Saipan), House Bill 23-34 seeks to establish and authorize the use of what's called "legend" drugs and controlled substances for euthanasia by animal control agencies and humane societies.

The House of Representatives adopted last week the Health and Welfare Committee report that recommends the bill's passage. All House members present at the session subsequently passed the legislation. The bill is now with the Senate for action.

Manibusan said the legislation proposes the use of federally approved legend drugs (prescription medications) or controlled substances, by trained individuals, as a method to euthanize animals in the Commonwealth.

The bill extends euthanasia by legend drugs or controlled substances to all animals; current local laws only focus on the disposal of dogs.

The bill authorizes the mayor to qualify institutions, such as a humane society or animal control agency, to conduct euthanasia in the Commonwealth.

As for the bill's policy implications, Manibusan pointed out that a quick review of animal euthanasia laws across the U.S. show that many states require licensed veterinarians to administer the controlled substances or drugs used for euthanasia. He said the current bill does not require veterinarians to administer or supervise the administration of such drugs. Instead, he said, the bill allows for any individual who completed legend drug or euthanasia training under a licensed veterinarian to do so.

While the bill provides the Commonwealth with access to euthanasia without a licensed veterinarian, Manibusan said there may be a need for heightened oversight and annual training or certification for individuals with access to such drugs who are not veterinarians.

Secondly, he said, there may be difficulty with obtaining federal permits as required by the bill, when there are comprehensive requirements for the purchase, storage, and administration of such drugs that generally require the involvement of a veterinarian.

After the passage of the bill and during the miscellaneous portion of the session, Propst said there have been primitive methods used in putting down dogs and that it needs to end.

"We need to depend on reliable, up-to-date medication and drugs for euthanizing sick animals that need to be put down and put it in safe and good hands," Propst said.

He thanked his colleagues for supporting the legislation and also those who are pushing for it such as the Saipan Humane Society, Boonie Babies, Saipan Care for Animals, and all the other animal advocates.

"I think it's sad when I hear people just say, 'Who cares about dogs? Who cares about cats?' We should care. We should care about our animals," he said.

# TINIAN CHRISTMAS LIGHTING EVENT

The Municipality of Tinian and Aguiguan held its annual Christmas Lighting Event last Dec. 7 at the Tinian Veterans Memorial Park. The park was virtually transformed into a tropical winter wonderland for all residents to enjoy the holiday season.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Community members gathered at the park in anticipation to witness the spectacular Christmas lights assembly.

The latte stones display was one of the highlights of the park. They are symbolic pillars of the Chamorro culture and are stone pillars topped with a capstone, traditionally used as the foundation of ancient Chamorro houses. The impressive display pays homage to the CNMI's history while igniting a sense of wonder and admiration among locals and visitors alike.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Christmas Lighting Event was capped by a performance by the Tinian Elementary School Chamorro Club students.

# CNMI Medicaid announces program updates

Effective Jan. 1, 2024, the Commonwealth Medicaid Agency has implemented several changes to eligibility requirements. Individuals enrolled in the Medicaid program are advised to review the new regulations, as these changes may impact their eligibility status.

**What are these changes?**

■ State Plan Amendment# MP 23-0005: In response to the National Public Health Emergency due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Medicaid temporarily increased the income limit from the originally approved State Plan of 150% to 180% of the SSI Federal Benefit Rate. This temporary extension had expired on Dec. 31, 2023. Effective Jan. 1, 2024, Medicaid will resume determining income using its original limit of 150% of the FBR.

■ State Plan Amendment# MP 23-0007: Effective Jan. 1, 2024, Medicaid will set a $100 limit for monthly spend down eligibility for individuals/households exceeding the 150% FBR income threshold.

**What do these changes mean?**

The adjustment implies a reduction in the income eligibility criteria. If your income remains unchanged from May 2020 to December 2023, there is a possibility that you may no longer satisfy the eligibility requirements for Medicaid benefits.

**What can I do now?**

In light of these changes, considerations should be made looking into other health insurance options through your employer or other private insurance providers.

**Eligibility & Enrollment Procedural Update**

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Medicaid temporarily suspended the need for notarized affidavits. As the pandemic is no longer recognized as a threat, the Commonwealth Medicaid Agency will be reinstating the requirement for a notarized affidavit for any supporting document if evidence cannot be provided with your application.

A copy of the State Plan Amendment #MP-23-0005 is available online at medicaid.cnmi.mp or on medicaid.gov.

State Plan Amendment #MP-23-0007 will be made available at a later date.

For more information, you may contact the Commonwealth Medicaid Agency at:

■ SAIPAN
Gov't Bldg. #1252 Capitol Hill
Mon-Thu
7:30am-1pm
Tel: (670) 664-4880/4882

■ ROTA
Rota Health Center
Mon-Fri
7:30am-4:30pm
Tel: (670) 532-9461

■ TINIAN
Tinian Health Center
Mon-Fri
7:30am-4:30pm
Tel: (670) 433-9263. ***(PR)***

SAIPAN TRIBUNE

The Commonwealth Medicaid Agency building on Capital Hill.

**IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS**

SHERRYL G. DELA CRUZ, Petitioner, vs. RANEL H. DELA CRUZ, Respondent,

**FCD-DI CIVIL ACTION NO. 23-0495**

**SUMMONS FOR PUBLICATION**

TO THE ABOVE NAME RESPONDENT:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and notified to file any answer you wish to make to the Complaint, a copy of which is on file with the court, within thirty (30) days after service of the Summons upon you, and to deliver or mail a copy of your answer to the Petitioner whose address is P.O. Box 7777 SVRB, Saipan, MP 96950, as soon as practical after filing your answer or sending it to the Clerk of Courts for filing.

Your answer should be in writing and filed with the Clerk of this Court at P.O. Box 500307 Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950. It may be prepared for you by your counsel and sent to the Clerk of this Court by messenger or Mail. It is not necessary for you to appear personally until further notice. If you fail to file and answer in accordance with this summons, judgement by default may be taken against you for relief in the complaint.

Dated this 22nd day of December 2023.

/s/
Clerk of Court

**IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS**

Li Fen Lu Delos Reyes (Name of Mother/Father), A.P.L.D.L.R. (Name(s) of Child(ren)), Plaintiffs, vs. Patrick Pinaula Delos Reyes (Name of the Mother/Father), Defendant

FCD PA CIVIL ACTION NO. 23-0491

**SUMMONS FOR FOR PUBLICATION**

TO THE ABOVE-NAMED DEFENDANT:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED and notified to file any answer you wish to make to the Complaint, a copy of which is on file with the Court, within thirty (30) days after service of the Summons upon you, and to deliver or mail a copy of your answer to the Plaintiff whose address is P.O. Box 7350 SVRB, Saipan MP 96950 as soon as practical after filing your answer or sending it to the Clerk of Courts for filing.

Your answer should be in writing and filed with the Clerk of this Court at Susupe, Saipan, MP 96950. It may be prepared for you by your counsel and sent to the Clerk of this Court by messenger or Mail. It is not necessary for you to appear personally until further notice. If you fail to file and answer in accordance with this Summons, Judgement by Default may be taken against you for relief in the Complaint.

Dated this 22nd day of December, 2023.

/s/
Clerk of Court

## NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION

P.O. BOX 500514, Saipan, MP 96950-0514
Email: nmhc@nmhc.gov.mp • Website: http://www.nmhcgov.net
Tels: (670) 234-9447 / 234-6866 / 234-7670 • Fax: (670) 234-9021

## PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

NMHC hereby publicly discloses that on Monday, January 31, 2022, Yvette R. and Ray D. Sablan, an immediate family member of Leilani A. Manibusan, an employee of NMHC, applied for assistance under the Community Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery (CDBG–DR) Affordable Rental Housing Development Program.

Said applicant is aware of the housing needs of Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) families who have been affected by Typhoon Mangkhut and Super Typhoon Yutu. The CNMI has not been able to recover from this disaster quickly enough to meet the community's housing needs. The "Westview Apartment" project proposes to build two (2) units, consisting of three-bedrooms each. The proposed project will contribute to addressing some of the market demands for affordable housing and the current housing shortages our island is experiencing. Leilani A. Manibusan is not and shall not be involved in the handling of this loan application.

NMHC discloses this possible conflict pursuant to 24 CFR § 92.356 in order to allow any interested persons to comment before the application is considered for an exception under the applicable conflict regulations.

**Any comments should be submitted to NMHC on or before Friday, January 12, 2024.**

Dated this 28th day of December, 2023.

/s/
Jesse S. Palacios
Corporate Director

# Saipan Marathon gets support from sister city Katori, Japan

MVA

The Katori Koedo Marathon was held on Dec. 10, 2023, in Katori, Japan. Katori is a sister city of Saipan in the Marianas, and the local government is helping to promote the 16th Annual Saipan Marathon to be held on March 9, 2024.

Close family ties are a hallmark of life in the Marianas, and the island of Saipan is feeling the love of its sister city, Katori, Japan, in helping to draw attention to Saipan Marathon 2024 on March 9. To further attract entries, the early bird registration deadline has been extended to Jan. 31, 2024.

A certified measured course by World Athletics in cooperation with AIMS (Association of International Marathons and Distance Races), Saipan Marathon is co-organized by the Marianas Visitors Authority and Northern Marianas Athletics and is sanctioned under the Northern Marianas Athletics rules and regulations.

At the request of the MVA, the Katori City government distributed a press release about the marathon to Chiba Prefecture media outlets last month. As a result, New Chiba Times was scheduled to publish an article about the race shortly after. In addition, the sister city is also promoting Saipan Marathon on its official Facebook page and via LINE, a communications app used by 80% of the population in Japan.

"We are deeply appreciative to the government of our sister city Katori for partnering with us to promote Saipan Marathon to their citizens," said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "Katori City and Saipan have a shared history, and we hope this will be another step toward building on that history and building new ties for a new generation. We look forward to that."

## » Early Bird deadline extended to Jan. 31, 2024

As a symbol of reciprocity, Concepcion announced that the Saipan Marathon will extend a special courtesy to marathon registrants from Katori that will be announced shortly.

On Dec. 10, the MVA was also given the opportunity to distribute leaflets promoting Saipan Marathon at Katori Koedo Marathon, a family running event with 3,800 participants this year. Leaflets will also be distributed at other larger running events through January around Japan, in addition to other ongoing marathon promotions.

Early bird rates through Jan. 31, 2024, are $90 for the full marathon, $60 for the half marathon, and $60 for the 10K and 5K. Full marathon participants must be age 18 or older. Half marathon participants must be age 14 or older. With valid photo ID, students ages 18 or younger by Dec. 31, 2023, may register for 10K or 5K for $40 through Dec. 31, 2023.

Beginning Jan. 1, rates will be $100 for the full marathon, $70 for half marathon, 10K, and 5K; and $50 for students. Fees will increase again on Feb. 1, 2024. The deadline to register is 5pm ChST on March 7, 2024, and participants may register at www.raceroster.com.

A new course highlighting iconic sites from the Marianas' rich history awaits full marathon runners. The road race will traverse sites from the various eras of Marianas history, including pre-history, the Spanish administration, the Japanese administration in the early 1900s, World War II, and modern history as a U.S. Commonwealth.

Cash prizes will be awarded for top finishers and by age division in the marathon. Participants will receive a limited edition official Saipan Marathon T-shirt, official Saipan Marathon medal, Certificate of Completion and one entry to the awards banquet, also on March 9.

To register visit https://raceroster.com/events/2024/78587/saipan-marathon-2024 or for more information contact MVA Community Projects coordinator Ed Diaz at 1 (670) 664-3210 or ediaz@mymarianas.com. ***(MVA)***

MVA

Masanori Shimada of Marianas Visitors Authority Japan office, right, distributes leaflet invitations to the 16th Annual Saipan Marathon during the Katori Koedo Marathon on Dec. 10, 2023, in Katori, Japan.

# Radewagen congratulates RMI President Hilda Heine

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Delegate Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen (R-AS), right, and President Hilda Heine of the Republic of the Marshall Islands pose for a picture in this file photo.

**WASHINGTON, D.C.—** Delegate Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen (R-AS) congratulates Hilda Heine upon her election as President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands through the convened Nitijeļā following the November general elections.

"Congratulations to President Heine upon her election to lead the Marshall Islands for the next term in these important times throughout the Pacific region," said Radewagen. "Congratulations also to the people of the Marshall Islands, who exercised their democratic responsibilities, and had their choice of two accomplished leaders, both thoroughly experienced in public service. I know both of these leaders, and had full confidence that either will continue to work well with the United States, as they have before, and uphold the shared priorities of our alliance. I look forward to working once again with President Heine for the next four years."

As part of a congressional delegation, Radewagen visited RMI a few months ago to discuss these shared priorities, and as chairman of the Indo-Pacific Task Force of the Natural Resources Committee, she worked in Congress for the necessary passage of a renewal of the Compact of Free Association agreement, already negotiated diplomatically over many months, to ensure formal preservation of this key alliance for the next 20 years. As co-chairman of the Pacific Islands Caucus, she and caucus colleagues focus on congressional issues related to the Pacific Islands, including American Samoa and RMI. ***(PR)***

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Saipan Fitbeat Lions Club's 2nd Annual Year-End Party was held last Saturday at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan with the theme "Saddle Up and Put Your Boots On, Wild Wild West."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Team Unbreakable won first place in the dance group competition.

# Saipan Fitbeat Lions Club holds Wild West-themed yearend party

Saipan Fitbeat Lions Club held its 2nd Annual Year-End Party with a theme "Saddle Up and Put Your Boots On, Wild Wild West" last Saturday at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan.

One of the yearend celebration's centerpiece events was a dance contest with the Unbreakable Group, led by Maricel Pangelinan and Jhoy Revilla, topping the competition and pocketing $500 cash.

Second place and $300 cash went to Team Unbeatable, led by Edna Aureo and Ayra Anier; while third place was awarded to Team Unstoppable, led by Martina Villas and Crisanta Brien. They took home $200 cash.

The club also chose the Top 5 Most Wanted Wild Wild West participants of the night, based on their costumes and looks, and the winner was Revilla, who received a cash prize and a trophy. Revilla beat out Martina Villas, Daisy Javillonar, Santa Alvarez, and Leonila Mendoza

In the 21-day weight loss challenge, Myrna Manungay took first place with a weight loss of 8.49%, Edna Aureo earned second place with a total weight loss of 8.13%, and Revilla secured third place with a weight loss of 5.65%.

The club also congratulated "Shadowers" who received special awards of appreciation—Revilla (all categories), Trishtonhy Duarte (Zumba kids), John Mark Cadion (all categories), and Rodolfo Irabon (Zumba Gold).

Saipan Fitbeat Lions Club president Michelle Olita wished all club members happy holidays and congratulated all the winners as well as participants of the yearend party's competitions.

Olita, who is a fitness instructor and the president of Xtreme Fitness670, also thanked the evening's judges, namely Maria Javier, Zin Abby Whang, Charlene Lizama, Anna Mae Adaza, and Ernie Molina. The latter also tabulated the score results for the dance contest.

"We would like to express our gratitude to all our sponsors who supported this event and made it possible. Special thanks to Atoy Banting, Anna Mae Adaza, Eden Mercado, Mar Masilungan, Maria Javier, Wilfredo Arago Abu, and the rest of the Lion Club members who showed up to support us. We would also like to thank our host for the night, Rosalyn Ajoste and Vic Obana for handling the music," she added.

Olita also took the opportunity to tell everyone in attendance that she and fellow Xtreme Fitness670 instructor Angelo Galfo offer various free fitness programs. These include Zumba Basic 1, Zumba toning, Zumba steps, Zumba gold, Zumba gold toning, Zumba kids and kids Jr., Aqua Zumba, Zumba plate, Circl Mobility, Zumba strong, kickboxing, weight training, tabata, and Aqua Body Strong at the Filcom Pavilion from Monday to Friday, 6:30pm-7:45pm. Additionally, on Saturday and Sunday, Olita and her group offer an anti-tobacco wellness program on Tinian, under the direction of Susan Perez. ***(Saipan Tribune)***

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

New "Shadowers," from left, Trishtonhy Jean Duarte (Zumba kids) John Mark Cadion (all categories), Rodolfo Irabon (Zumba gold) and Jhoy Ortiz Revilla (all categories).

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jhoy Ortiz Revilla won Best in the West of the Night.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Saipan Fitbeat Lions Club's 21-day weight loss challenge Top 5.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Team Unbeatable won second place in the dance group competition.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Top 5 Most Wanted. from left, Leonila Mendoza, Santa Alvarez, Martina Villas, Daisy Javillonar, and Jhoy Ortiz Revilla with Anna Mae Adaza.

# Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
THE CNMI'S FIRST DAILY NEWSPAPER
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**Mark Rabago** EDITOR
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MEMBER

The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

## A COVID-19 memorial will help Chicago remember

The COVID-19 pandemic was a horrible period in history, not least for the United States, which suffered more than a million dead and at least 6.5 million hospitalizations—and counting.

In terms of lives disrupted, businesses ruined and urban downtowns deserted, the U.S. fared especially badly. Just imagine how much worse the pandemic could have been without the selfless determination of medical professionals who cared for the isolated, sick and dying, as well as other essential workers.

No one should ever forget the sacrifices of those who rose to the occasion, from firefighters to retail sales clerks. Nor should we forget the ongoing effects among those who suffered during lockdown, lost loved ones, continue to contract new cases of the virus or struggle with lingering symptoms.

A group composed mostly of Chicagoans who also believe no one should ever forget has come up with a smart plan to make sure no one ever does. We admire what they are doing.

The self-titled COVID-19 Monument Commission is leading a grassroots fundraising campaign via private and corporate donations for a sculpture and outdoor park area that will provide a physical location to reflect on the pandemic and help people to heal.

The all-volunteer group recently announced the winner of a global design competition, choosing a Georgia-based artist whose sculpture concept features a dandelion. The common flower is intended to reflect the global ubiquity of the disease, the starburst-like shape of the virus itself and the promise of resilience. (Those who have tried to get rid of dandelions in lawns can testify to their resilience.)

The Illinois Medical District, a special-use urban zoning area with 560 acres west of the Loop, has donated land for the monument and park, in a spot open to the public, as a tribute to front-line workers and those who suffered from the illness.

Construction is expected to get underway next year, with a dedication set for spring 2025. A virtual, online presence also will ensure the monument is accessible for those far removed from its physical location, according to Sally Metzler, a longtime Chicago resident and art historian who chairs the commission.

She noted that the pandemic has affected everyone. "It was 100% inclusive," she said.

"Every citizen, nation, race and religion experienced the pandemic. Whether at best, lockdown, or at worst, loss of life or loss of a loved one, COVID-19 left no one unscathed."

She's right, of course. And it continues.

While it's true the latest strain of COVID-19 is much less lethal than its predecessors, it is still killing Americans at a shocking rate, accounting for 3% of deaths from all causes. That translates into more than 1,000 deaths from COVID-19 every week.

Let's never forget the pandemic, and especially the heroes who helped us get through it. And let's honor them not only with a fitting monument, but also by doing everything possible to knock out this dreadful disease.

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## An election-year plan to undermine prescription patents is harmful to our health

**By BRUCE YANDLE**
Tribune News Service

*Bruce Yandle is a distinguished adjunct fellow with the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, dean emeritus of the Clemson University College of Business & Behavioral Science, and a former executive director of the Federal Trade Commission.*

In a public effort to bring down prescription drug prices, the Biden administration plans to use the government's "march-in" authority to sever some pharmaceutical drug patent protections. By setting aside patents on discoveries that relied on some amount of government funding, we would presumably see more generic, lower-cost versions of popular prescription medicines.

This election-season policymaking may deliver lower prices to some people, but the resulting market chaos could be harmful to our health.

Drug price increases covered by Medicare have exceeded inflation's pace since 2019. Biden, reacting strongly and perhaps anxious about his reelection prospects, has outlined a proposal to be applied ex post facto—after the fact—to patents and licensing arrangements built on investment-backed expectations. A less disruptive policy change would be applied to future patent property rights, allowing investors to make decisions with their eyes wide open.

But the average voter cares little about corporate concerns, as the president's team knows. What should matter to everyone is the effect on future drug development and other inventions.

The accompanying White House policy statement reveals the president's uneven political hand by referring to drug company price-setting as "corporate greed." It may be argued that folks who want cheaper drugs (however justifiably) and most politicians who want votes are greedy, too. If greed is wanting more for less, it's a human trait. Referring to corporations, which are, after all, legal documents in file cabinets, as such is a clear case of misplaced concreteness.

The whole matter is relatively new. Patent protection for drugs discovered and produced partly with federal funding was codified in the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act. Prior to that, the government retained the rights. No patents were granted to universities or other research organizations which, with government funding, discovered a basis for new drug products. Without much incentive, research and commercialization activity after basic discoveries were made in university labs languished.

The act reinvigorated and encouraged discovery, and there has since been a large increase in the commercialization of new drugs. As Sens. Birch Bayh and Bob Dole explained in a 2002 letter to the Washington Post, "the purpose of our act was to spur the interaction between public and private research so that patients would receive the benefits of innovative science sooner … Bayh-Dole did not intend that government set prices on resulting products."

Today, Biden administration economic adviser Lael Brainard indicates that the president thinks otherwise: "We'll make it clear that when drug companies won't sell taxpayer-funded drugs at reasonable prices, we will be prepared to allow other companies to provide those drugs for less."

It seems that the affected drug producers are on their way to becoming regulated public utilities. The Department of Commerce is instructed to develop procedures to determine when existing patent protection may be removed. Its mandate covers all patented inventions that result with the assistance of federal funds—not just pharmaceutical products.

The question of what, if anything, is due to American taxpayers who partly fund the development of medical advances—those which they later buy and benefit from as consumers—is important and meaningful. A 2020 research paper on the matter published by the National Institutes of Health argues that we're already getting a good return, rather than being charged twice:

"In the debate over prescription drug pricing, some pharmaceutical industry critics claim that U.S. taxpayers pay twice for costly therapies … In fact, the empirical evidence supporting these claims is weak, and the pay twice argument distracts from important efforts to ensure that impactful new drugs continue to be developed and made widely available to patients who need them."

The president's flawed argument—one which would abandon a proven approach and subject legitimate patents to the whim of executive branch agencies and politicians—is a path to fewer future remedies for human suffering.

Granted, the pricing of products that spring from taxpayer supported research should be open to evenhanded debate and review. "Evenhanded" does not describe powerful politicians making blanket assertions that those who produce and market patented life-saving medicines are greedy.

Major policy changes should be debated on a forward-looking basis, not ex post facto. Otherwise, drug producers will find themselves operating in a sea of uncertainty, and someday, some new drug that we could use won't be there.

# My life after meth—learning to open and close the curtains

**By HANNAH SWARD**
Los Angeles Times

*Hannah Sward is a writer living in Los Angeles. She is the award-winning author of* Strip: A Memoir.

When I was on meth, I was busy. Very busy. There was gardening to do, color-coding the closet, taking apart doorknobs, trying to put doorknobs back together and trips to Home Depot at 3 a.m. to look at light fixtures and nails. I had things to do, and whatever I was doing I was very interested in. Until I wasn't, leaving the bathroom doorknob on the floor and moving on to some other project.

Time on meth is very different from time with no meth.

No more gardening or trips to Home Depot. Everything stops. Imagine. You've been busy not sleeping, not eating, not living in real time for a decade. Then one day you stop. How do you live?

For example, it's 10 p.m. and you brush your teeth and wash your face, you get ready for bed. Yes, bed. Then, you take it a step further and get into bed. At 10 p.m. It's dark out. The birds are not singing and the sun is not up. Which is how it's supposed to be when people go to bed. You turn off your light and lie there.

After a decade of not sleeping, sleep feels good. Really good. So you sleep for 24 hours. Then another 24 hours, then another. After 3½ days you're hungry.

Hungry. After a decade of not eating you are very hungry. So you go to IHOP and order breakfast, lunch and dinner. Then you don't feel so good but that's OK, you're used to not feeling good. A decade of meth will do that to you.

So you've slept, eaten and now, well, you could sleep some more. So you do. For another couple of days and you think to yourself, I can do this. I can do this living sober thing.

Now, it's week two. Now, when you go to sleep you no longer need 72 hours, so you do what normal people do and you wake up in the morning. And now, at week two, things get real.

You've woken up and it's time to get up, get out of bed. You think about the day ahead. It's overwhelming. It's scary. And you're depressed. Really depressed. After a decade of meth there is no dopamine left in your body.

You try to go back to sleep. But you can't. So you get up. Open the curtains. Which means you closed the curtains the night before. When was the last time you closed and then opened your curtains? You stand there, looking out the window with the curtains open. Then you close them and open them again. The birds are singing. You start crying.

Everything is overwhelming. Going to bed. Getting up. Closing the curtains. Opening the curtains. Standing at the window looking out and now the birds, it's all too much. You can't do it. You're exhausted.

Coffee.

That's a good idea. You think: I can do this sobriety thing. A cup of coffee sounds good. But there is no coffee. There is not even a coffee maker because of the meth.

Now, it's next level—time to get dressed and go to the store. Black-belt sobriety. This is deliberate. A choice. The store. Coffee.

You're seized with anxiety. You decide you can't, so you don't, and you force yourself back to bed because getting dressed, going to the store, it's all too much.

Fast forward to later when you have dressed and made it down the street to Ralphs. Entering is another whole thing. But let's fast forward again and say you have gone in and you have a handheld basket and there are 14 aisles. And the only aisle visible is the wine aisle. And even though meth was your thing, alcohol was part of it too.

Things get blurry. You feel dizzy. Your heart is thumping, palms sweaty. You put down the basket and walk out of the store. You faint. You come to and you're sitting on the steps in front of Ralphs with some nice lady rubbing your back and handing you a bottle of water.

Now, as drained as you are, you feel you have survived the worst, so you get up and stand brave and head back into the store. But you realize you're pushing it. And it's OK. So you go home, and it already feels like a day. You look at the clock. 11:10 a.m.

You're exhausted. It's only day eight at 11:10 a.m. How are you going to get through this day?

It's unbearable, but somehow you do. And you do it again and again and again. And each day you add something in. And some days you don't. Some days you may not even get out of bed.

But then the next day you have made it to Ralphs and there's coffee in your basket and a can of soup. Lentils. You love lentils. Maybe you even have some crackers and a banana.

Some days, even with years of sobriety, you have to go back to basics. Open the curtains, look out the window, listen to the birds, make a cup of coffee.

# The mighty coast redwoods are born to change. But can they evolve fast enough to survive climate warming?

**By DANIEL LEWIS**
Los Angeles Times

*Daniel Lewis teaches environmental humanities at Caltech and is a senior curator at the Huntington. He is author of the forthcoming* book Twelve Trees: The Deep Roots of Our Future.

Coast redwoods—enormous, spectacular trees, some reaching nearly 400 feet, the tallest plants on the planet—thrive mostly in a narrow strip of land in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. Most of them grow from southern Oregon down into Northern California, snugged up against the rugged Pacific coast.

They have grown by slowly responding to moisture and rich alluvial soil over millenniums, combined with a genetic payload that pushes them to the upper limits of tree height. They are at risk—down to perhaps 70,000 individuals, falling from at least a half-million trees before humans arrived, but that's not a new story, for we are all at risk.

Redwoods, like all trees, are engineered marvels. People don't tend to think of natural things as "structures," leaving that term to stand in for buildings, bridges and dams. But although trees were not built by humans, they didn't just happen. They have come into their own through the inexorably turning wheels of natural selection and evolution, responding to environmental pressures, genetic drift and mutation (they even have two kinds of leaves that help the trees adapt to both wet and dry conditions). They are born to change, just as humans are born to change.

Evolution is usually a very slow process, although sometimes it's surprisingly quick. New, intense pressures of a warming and changing climate are speeding things up, and forcing researchers and horticulturists to examine approaches to climate change resilience and technologies like geographic information systems.

Of course, there are differences between man-made edifices and trees. A structure or building typically is a sort of island unto itself, separate from its neighbors; in contrast, the coast redwood is an ecosystem with enormously broad consequences for other life forms.

Life is folded in and among the redwoods, below and within and about them. The trees are integrators, bringing together many life forms. Some of these life forms rely on the tree, others on occupants in and around the tree.

The coast redwood hosts so many different ecological interactions that it's faintly ridiculous. Consider the wandering salamander, which usually spends its entire life high in the canopy, but sometimes must jump out to escape predators. Without wings or gliding, it falls from a great height only to land perfectly unharmed on the ground.

It took scientists dropping these creatures into a wind tunnel and filming them with high-speed cameras to understand why they didn't end up as a wet splat on the forest floor. As it turns out, the salamander's flattened body shape and large feet with long toes create just enough drag and balance for a soft landing.

Redwoods are so large that one reportedly was found to house a Sitka spruce, 8 feet tall, growing far off the ground within the larger tree. Redwoods also have served for millenniums as nesting habitat for huge California condors, with wingspans of nearly 10 feet.

There's also a place for the tiny, living side by side with all of the largeness tucked in the complex, secret interstices of these trees. Nestled into extensive mats of ferns that grow high up in redwood canopies, researchers find aquatic crustaceans called copepods that normally would live in larger bodies of water. No one knows how they got into the trees, but the fern mats trap enormous quantities of moisture from rain and fog, creating wetlands in the sky.

Yet even species as enduring as coast redwoods are affected by climate change. Diminished moisture stresses the trees, making them grow with less vigor. New fire dangers put them at risk, and more frequent floods erode the big trees' footing. But redwoods also are adapting.

A 2018 survey of nine large redwood trees found a total of 137 species of lichen growing on the trees, including several that were new to science. One was Xylopsora canopeorum, whose specific name celebrates the canopy where it was discovered.

This lichen seems to be unique to the warmer and drier forests in California's Sonoma and Santa Cruz counties, in the southern part of coast redwoods' range. This is an exciting finding, for it provides evidence that new forms of life—ecosystem partners—may be evolving in sync with trees that are also evolving in the face of climate change.

A pair of redwoods grow just outside my office at the Huntington in San Marino, which is some 700 miles south of the coast redwood's usual range. I've resisted giving names to this duo, although many giant redwoods have monikers like Adventure, Brutus, Nugget, Paradox and Atlas—most named by the scientists who first quantified their extreme heights.

The redwoods outside my window are perhaps 100 feet tall—puny by comparison to their northern brethren. But they are healthy, and will continue to be shaped by their immediate environments. They've traveled far to get to here, planted more than a half-century ago by an earlier generation of horticulturalists, and they're thriving in their new home. We should all be so lucky.

# New Year's Volutions and Resolutions

**LITERARY NOOK**

**By JOEY CONNOLLY**
Special to the Saipan Tribune

*Joey aka Pepe Batbon Connolly is a retired educator who taught in the CNMI, NOLA, and LVNV. He is a sonnet practitioner who enjoys stargazing.*

## 2024 Resolutions and Solutions

All New Year's Eve vomit is a vile ablution
pick fresh from Shakespearean attributions
think of Benjamin Franklin's contributions
contemplate your new brain drain contusions

Are resolutions gaining more diminution
leaning forwards towards failure's evolution
few New Year's promises will reach fruition
many resolves require a fresh elocution

Annual promises need strong institution
many amount to drunken verbal pollution
could A I bring a resolution revolution
should we have some alternate substitution

Resolutions cause dissonance and confusion
find solutions in your brain's convolutions.

## Weight Resolution and Dissolution

I'm gonna lose weight, now for some fried chicken
with melting butter on mashed potatoes and gravy
I realize eating that will make my waist thicken
and then find all my rolls of fat wider and wavy

Last night I woke from a resolution dream
how about giving up cookies and candy
dare I include donuts cake and all ice cream
avoiding any two of those would be dandy

What about oily and fried foods of all kinds
Eating so much of it I just can't keep tabs
high fructose corn syrup and fried pork rinds
puff out out my large twelve pack of flabs

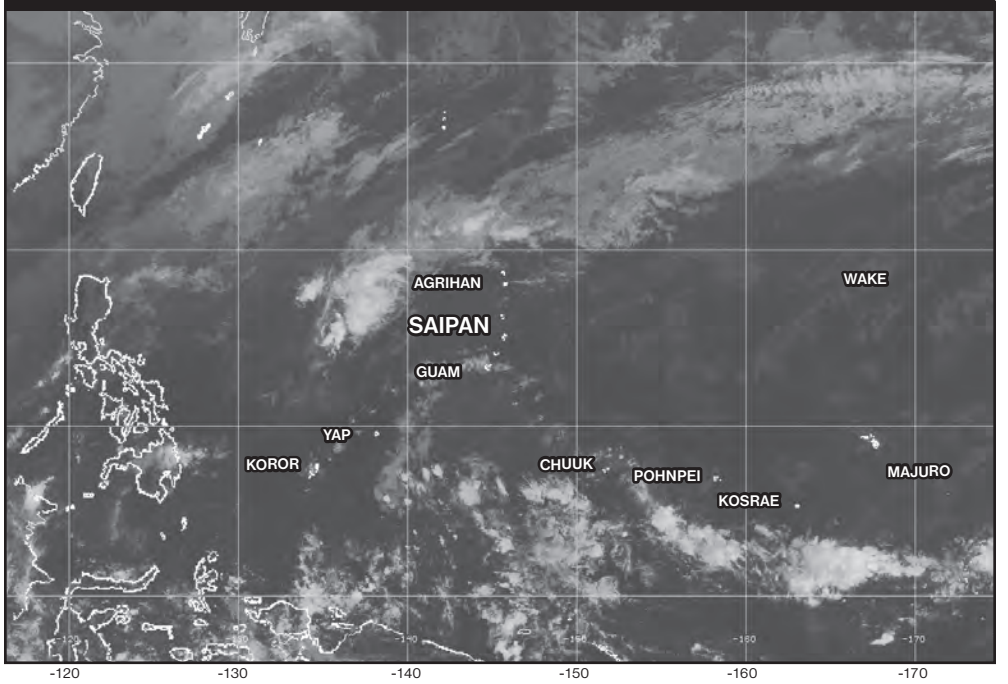
Local photos show some with morbid obesity
weight loss for them is an absolute necessity.

# The Weather

## 5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

| TODAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY | MONDAY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 10 to 15 mph. | Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph. | Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph. | Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph. | Breezy. Partly cloudy with a 10 percent chance of showers. |
| 86 / 77° | 86 / 77° | 86 / 77° | 86 / 77° | 86 / 77° |

## YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE




**PICTURE TIME: 8:01 AM WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2024**

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Satellite shows partly sunny skies and isolated trade-wind showers passing through the Marianas Waters this morning, with scattered showers south of Guam. The buoys reveal combined seas of 4 to 6 feet composed of a trade-wind swell from just north of east, and wind waves.

*Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/*

| MICRONESIA | | ▲ ▼ °F |
|---|---|---|
| Guam and Rota | Partly Cloudy | 87 / 76° |
| Palau | Partly Cloudy | 88 / 77° |
| Yap | Partly Cloudy | 86 / 76° |
| Chuuk | Thunderstorms | 84 / 77° |
| Pohnpei | Partly Cloudy | 87 / 78° |
| Kosrae | Partly Cloudy | 86 / 80° |
| Majuro | Partly Cloudy | 87 / 79° |

| DAY | SUNRISE | SUNSET |
|---|---|---|
| Today | 6:43 AM | 5:59 PM |
| Friday | 6:43 AM | 5:59 PM |
| Saturday | 6:43 AM | 6:00 PM |
| Sunday | 6:44 AM | 6:00 PM |
| Monday | 6:45 AM | 6:01 PM |

| DAY | MOONRISE | MOONSET | MOONRISE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Today | - | 12:06 PM | - |
| Friday | 12:40 AM | 12:40 PM | - |
| Saturday | 1:28 AM | 1:17 PM | - |
| Sunday | 2:20 AM | 1:58 PM | - |
| Monday | 3:15 AM | 2:45 PM | - |

| AROUND THE GLOBE | | ▲ ▼ °F |
|---|---|---|
| Auckland | Partly Cloudy | 77° / 62° |
| Beijing | Fair | 38° / 26° |
| Hong Kong | Fair | 68° / 60° |
| Honolulu | Partly Cloudy | 81° / 72° |
| London | Partly Cloudy | 39° / 29° |
| Los Angeles | Mostly Sunny | 68° / 49° |
| Manila | Partly Cloudy | 88° / 75° |
| Melbourne | Clouds | 65° / 57° |
| Miami | Mostly Sunny | 72° / 62° |
| New York | Mostly Sunny | 44° / 31° |
| Osaka | Partly Cloudy | 48° / 37° |
| Paris | Cloudy | 38° / 30° |
| Busan | Sunny | 37° / 19° |
| Rome | Showers | 51° / 39° |
| Salem | Partly Cloudy | 57° / 38° |
| San Francisco | Showers | 55° / 46° |
| Seoul | Mostly Sunny | 28° / 1° |
| Tokyo | Partly Cloudy | 49° / 37° |
| Washington, DC | Mostly Sunny | 46° / 31° |

| TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY | | FEET |
|---|---|---|
| 12:29 AM | High Tide | 1.09 |
| 6:43 AM | Low Tide | 0.45 |
| 1:33 PM | High Tide | 1.57 |
| 8:42 PM | Low Tide | 0.49 |

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# FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 1, 2024

## DEPARTURES

### SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA076 | 9:50AM | 10:35AM | Daily |

### SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA824 | 7:05AM | 9:45AM | 1, 3, 5 |

### GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| PR 111 | 5:55AM | 7:55AM | Daily |
| UA193 | 7:50PM | 11:50PM | 2, 5 via Palau |
| UA183 | 7:55PM | 9:50PM | Daily |

### SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| OZ626/703 | 3:10AM | 10:30PM | 4, 7 via ICN |
| 7C3403/2305 | 4:40AM | 10:20PM | Daily |
| UA076/183 | 9:50AM | 9:50PM | Daily via Guam |
| UA076/193 | 9:50AM | 11:50PM | 2, 5 via Guam, Palau |

### SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| TW308 | 2:15AM | 6:10AM | Daily |
| OZ626 | 3:10AM | 6:55AM | 4,7 |
| 7C3403 | 4:40AM | 8:35AM | Daily |
| 7C3405 | 4:35PM | 8:25PM | Daily |

## ARRIVALS

### GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA174 | 8:00AM | 8:45AM | Daily |

### NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA825 | 9:25PM | 2:00AM+1 | 2, 4, 7 |

### MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA189 | 00:40AM | 6:30AM | 3, 6 |
| PR110 | 10:05PM | 3:55AM+1 | Daily |
| UA192 | 10:40PM | 6:30AM+1 | 2, 5 via Palau |
| UA184 | 10:55PM | 4:45AM+1 | 1, 3, 4, 6, 7 |

### MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| UA189/174 | 00:40AM | 8:45AM+1 | 3, 6 via Guam |
| OZ702/625 | 12:05PM | 1:40AM+1 | 3, 6 via ICN |
| UA192/174 | 10:40PM | 8:45AM+1 | 2, 5 via Palau, Guam |
| UA184/174 | 10:55PM | 8:45AM+1 | 1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam |
| 7C2306/3406 | 11:15PM | 3:30PM+1 | Daily |

### INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7C3406 | 10:10AM | 3:30PM | Daily |
| TW307 | 7:45PM | 1:15AM+1 | Daily |
| 7C3404 | 10:15PM | 3:35AM+1 | Daily |
| OZ625 | 8:20PM | 1:40AM+1 | 3, 6 |

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

# STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JANUARY 2, 2024

### SAIPAN TO ROTA

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1301 | SAIPAN | ROTA | 08:30 | 09:00 | Daily |
| 1302 | SAIPAN | ROTA | 10:30 | 11:00 | Daily |
| 1303 | SAIPAN | ROTA | 15:30 | 16:00 | Daily |

### ROTA TO SAIPAN

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3101 | ROTA | SAIPAN | 9:30 | 10:00 | Daily |
| 3102 | ROTA | SAIPAN | 11:30 | 12:00 | Saturday & Sunday |
| 3103 | ROTA | SAIPAN | 13:30 | 14:00 | Monday To Friday |
| 3104 | ROTA | SAIPAN | 16:30 | 17:00 | Daily |

### ROTA TO GUAM

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3401 | ROTA | GUAM | 11:30 | 12:00 | Monday To Friday |

### GUAM TO ROTA

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4301 | GUAM | ROTA | 12:30 | 13:00 | Monday To Friday |

### SAIPAN TO TINIAN

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1201 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 7:30 | 7:45 | Daily |
| 1202 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 8:00 | 8:15 | Daily |
| 1203 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 9:00 | 9:15 | Daily |
| 1204 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 10:00 | 10:15 | Daily |
| 1206 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 14:00 | 14:15 | Daily |
| 1207 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 15:00 | 15:15 | Daily |
| 1208 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 16:00 | 16:15 | Daily |
| 1209 | SAIPAN | TINIAN | 17:00 | 17:15 | Daily |

### TINIAN TO SAIPAN

| FLIGHT # | FROM | TO | DEPARTS | ARRIVES | FREQUENCY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2101 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 8:00 | 8:15 | Daily |
| 2102 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 8:30 | 8:45 | Daily |
| 2103 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 9:30 | 9:45 | Daily |
| 2104 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 10:30 | 10:45 | Daily |
| 2106 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 14:30 | 14:45 | Daily |
| 2107 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 15:30 | 15:45 | Daily |
| 2108 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 16:30 | 16:45 | Daily |
| 2109 | TINIAN | SAIPAN | 17:30 | 17:45 | Daily |

# Business

## Chamber readies for Annual Business Person of the Year gala

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce will be hosting its signature event of the year, the Annual Business Person of the Year Gala, on Saturday, Jan. 27, 2024, at the Kensington Hall of the Kensington Hotel Saipan with the theme "Hafa Adai yan Tirow." This event not only honors business excellence in the CNMI but also serves as a platform for the induction of the newly elected and returning board of directors.

Embracing our island's unique style, the Chamber encourages attendees to dress in island formal wear, adding a local touch to the celebration. The evening will consist of elegance and significance as the Chamber acknowledges outstanding contributions to and by our local business community.

MARK RABAGO

Marianas Alliance of Non-Governmental Organizations won the Chamber Member of the Year award during last year's 2022 "Bowties & Diamonds" Business Person of the Year annual fundraiser gala at Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan's Hibiscus Hall.

Awards will be presented in various categories, including the 2023 Chamber Member of the Year, 2023 Nonprofit of the Year, 2023 Small Business of the Year, and the newly added 2023 Sustainable Business of the Year, in collaboration with the Marianas Islands Nature Alliance, a proud Chamber member. The selected awardee of each category must have demonstrated exceptional dedication, innovation, and community impact throughout the year.

A highlight and tradition of the evening will be the awarding of the 2023 Business Person of the Year, a recognition granted to an individual who has demonstrated exceptional leadership and influence within the business community and beyond.

Tickets for this event are available at $150 per person, inclusive of an open bar. Please join us for a night filled with live music, silent auction activities, dinner, networking, recognition, and good vibes. For those looking to share the experience, group reservations for tables of eight are available at $1,100, with the open bar plus a complimentary premium bottle of wine.

Don't miss the opportunity to join in on the fun at one of the Chamber's signature events of the year.

We invite the community to join us for this night of celebration! Register now through this link: https://business.saipanchamber.com/events/details/2023-annual-business-person-of-the-year-gala-355

Or you may contact the SCC office at (670) 234-7150 or email contactus@saipanchamber.org. ***(PR)***

## State tax cutting trend faces headwinds from declining revenues, tighter budgets

**JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.** (AP)—Income, sales, property and gas taxes: Almost every U.S. state cut at least one such broad-based tax as budget surpluses soared over the past three years.

Some states made permanent tax reductions. Others passed one-time rebates or temporary suspensions. One way or another, whether red or blue, all states save Alaska and Nevada joined in.

Though even more tax cuts are likely, the trend may be slowing as 2024 legislative sessions begin. That's because the pandemic-era revenue surge fueled by federal spending and inflation now is receding and, in some states, even reversing into negative numbers.

"Next year will likely be a return to normal for state budgets," said Brian Sigritz, director of state fiscal studies for the National Association of State Budget Officers. "Funds will be more limited. States will have to make decisions on what areas they prioritize."

California, where financial swings are felt more sharply than most states, has a projected budget deficit of a record $68 billion, an amount exceeding its hefty reserves. Just years after enjoying a record $100 billion surplus, Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom is now facing a challenging task as he prepares to present the state budget in January.

Though not in the same hole as California, other states also have seen tax revenues decline and spending exceed forecasts. Arizona could face a $400 million shortfall in its 2024 fiscal year. Maryland's legislative staff recently projected a $761 million budget deficit in 2025, growing to nearly $2.7 billion by 2029 without significant revenue increases or spending reductions.

And Minnesota's budget office says a projected $2.4 billion surplus for the current two-year budget cycle could flip upside down in the next period, resulting in a $2.3 billion shortfall by the 2026-27 fiscal years.

It's hard to say how much, if any, of the projected shortfalls are attributable to tax rebates or reductions passed in each particular state. But in general, as tax collections slow, "we're seeing the impacts of widespread tax cuts being implemented across states," said Justin Theal, a state fiscal policy officer for the nonprofit Pew Charitable Trusts.

As a whole, state-level tax reductions are projected to result in $13.3 billion less in general revenue this year compared to what states otherwise would have collected, according to a recent report by the National Association of State Budget Officers. That follows a $15.5 billion net tax reduction from the 2023 fiscal year.

About four-fifths of the states passed some sort of income tax break since 2021, according to a tally by The Associated Press. Those include cash-back plans, such as Delaware's $300 rebate and California's rebate of between $200 and $1,050 for individuals earning up to $250,000 and households up to $500,000.

The tally also includes targeted tax breaks such as expanded deductions or credits for families with children and seniors on retirement incomes. And it includes permanent individual income tax rate reductions enacted primarily by Republican-led states such as Missouri and Mississippi, which is now feuding internally over new revenue projections.

The past few years marked the largest wave of individual income tax rate reductions since states began enacting such taxes over a century ago, said Jared Walczk, vice president of state projects at the nonprofit Tax Foundation.

Alaska and Nevada are among nine states that levy no individual income tax. Alaska also has no statewide sales tax, instead relying heavily on oil revenue and earnings from investment funds.

The bulk of Nevada's revenue comes from sales and gambling taxes, which fall heavily on out-of-state travelers spending money in places like the Las Vegas Strip. As a result, Nevada's revenue plummeted when the COVID-19 pandemic kept tourists away, then rebounded to produce a historic $11.6 billion biennial budget as tourists returned and inflation took hold.

New Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo proposed last year to suspend the state's gasoline tax, which would have added Nevada to the national tax-cutting trend. But the plan went nowhere in the Democratic-led Legislature. Lombardo said in a statement to the AP that his plan "would have saved Nevada families and small businesses millions" of dollars,

But Democratic state Sen. Rochelle T. Nguyen, who sits on the Senate Finance Committee, said there was no way of ensuring Nevada residents would have been the main beneficiaries, or that oil companies wouldn't have hiked prices despite the suspension. Nevada's two metro areas, Las Vegas and Reno, are a short trip from the California border, along with Nevada's side of Lake Tahoe.

"Why would we spend $250 million in Nevada taxpayer money cutting gas taxes for Californians?" Nguyen said.

Though fewer states may pursue income tax cuts this year, more may be looking to provide property tax relief, Walczak said.

## US national debt hits record $34T as Congress gears up for funding fight

**WASHINGTON** (AP)—The federal government's gross national debt has surpassed $34 trillion, a record high that foreshadows the coming political and economic challenges to improve America's balance sheet in the coming years.

The U.S. Treasury Department issued a report Tuesday logging U.S. finances, which have become a source of tension in a politically divided Washington that could possibly see parts of the government shutdown without an annual budget in place.

Republican lawmakers and the White House agreed last June to temporarily lift the nation's debt limit, staving off the risk of what would be a historic default. That agreement lasts until January 2025. Here are some answers to questions about the new record national debt.

The national debt eclipsed $34 trillion several years sooner than pre-pandemic projections. The Congressional Budget Office's January 2020 projections had gross federal debt eclipsing $34 trillion in fiscal year 2029.

But the debt grew faster than expected because of a multiyear pandemic starting in 2020 that shut down much of the U.S. economy. The government borrowed heavily under then President Donald Trump and current President Joe Biden to stabilize the economy and support a recovery. But the rebound came with a surge of inflation that pushed up interest rates and made it more expensive for the government to service its debts.

"So far, Washington has been spending money as if we had unlimited resources," said Sung Won Sohn, an economics professor at Loyola Marymount University. "But the bottom line is there is no free lunch," he said, "and I think the outlook is pretty grim."

The gross debt includes money that the government owes itself, so most policymakers rely on the total debt held by the public in assessing the government's finances. This lower figure—$26.9 trillion—is roughly equal in size to the U.S. gross domestic product.

Last June, the Congressional Budget Office estimated in its 30-year outlook that publicly held debt will be equal to a record 181% of American economic activity by 2053.

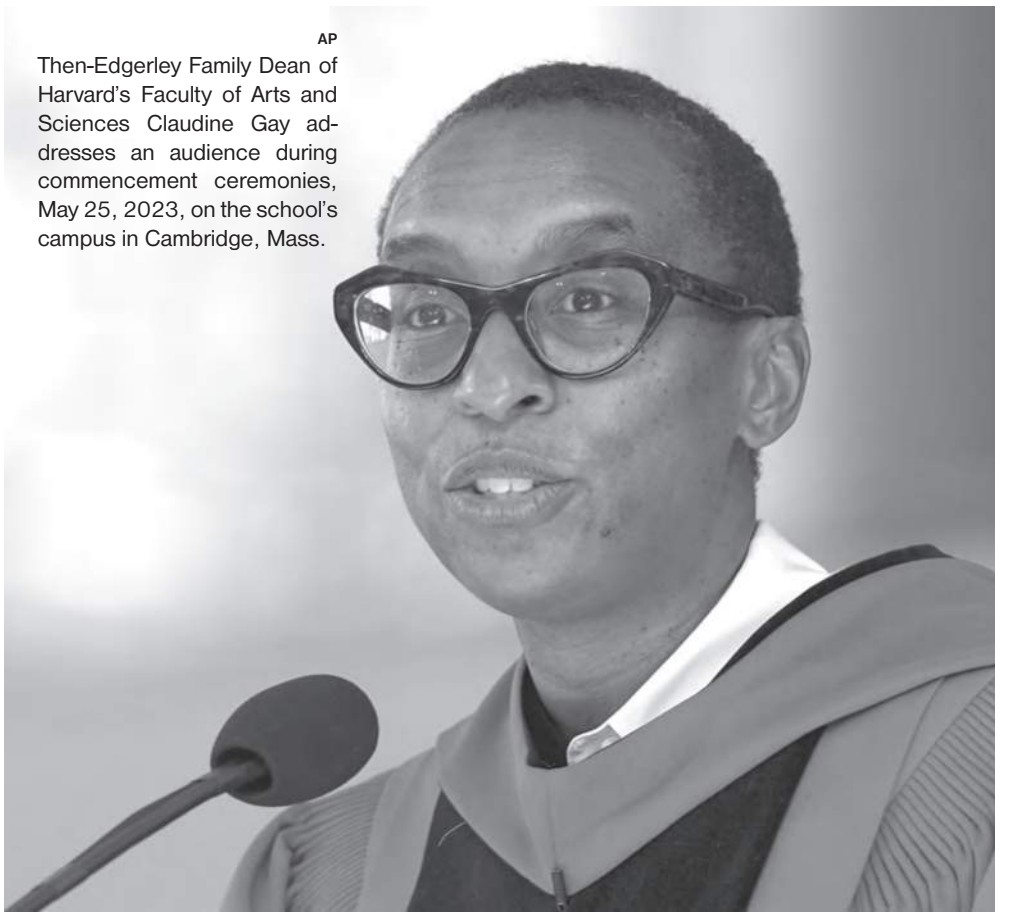
The national debt does not appear to be a weight on the U.S. economy right now, as investors are willing to lend the federal government money. This lending allows the government to keep spending on programs without having to raise taxes.

But the debt's path in the decades to come might put at risk national security and major programs, including Social Security and Medicare, which have become the most prominent drivers of forecasted government spending over the next few decades. Government dysfunction, such as another debt limit showdown, could also be a financial risk if investors worry about lawmakers' willingness to repay the U.S. debt.

# Nation

# Harvard president resigns amid plagiarism claims

## » Also backlash from antisemitism testimony



AP

Then-Edgerley Family Dean of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences Claudine Gay addresses an audience during commencement ceremonies, May 25, 2023, on the school's campus in Cambridge, Mass.

**CAMBRIDGE, Mass.** (AP)—Harvard University President Claudine Gay resigned Tuesday amid plagiarism accusations and criticism over testimony at a congressional hearing where she was unable to say unequivocally that calls on campus for the genocide of Jews would violate the school's conduct policy.

Gay is the second Ivy League president to resign in the past month following the congressional testimony—Liz Magill, president of the University of Pennsylvania, resigned Dec. 9.

Gay, Harvard's first Black president, announced her departure just months into her tenure in a letter to the Harvard community.

Following the congressional hearing, Gay's academic career came under intense scrutiny by conservative activists who unearthed several instances of alleged plagiarism in her 1997 doctoral dissertation. The Harvard Corporation, Harvard's governing board, initially rallied behind Gay, saying a review of her scholarly work turned up "a few instances of inadequate citation" but no evidence of research misconduct.

Days later, the Harvard Corporation said it found two additional examples of "duplicative language without appropriate attribution." The board said Gay would update her dissertation and request corrections.

The Harvard Corporation said the resignation came "with great sadness" and thanked Gay for her "deep and unwavering commitment to Harvard and to the pursuit of academic excellence."

Alan M. Garber, provost and chief academic officer, will serve as interim president until Harvard finds a replacement, the board said in a statement. Garber, an economist and physician, has served as provost for 12 years.

Gay's resignation was celebrated by the conservatives who put her alleged plagiarism in the national spotlight—with additional plagiarism accusations surfacing as recently as Monday in The Washington Free Beacon, a conservative publication.

Christopher Rufo, an activist who has helped rally the GOP against higher education, said he's "glad she's gone."

"Rather than take responsibility for minimizing antisemitism, committing serial plagiarism, intimidating the free press, and damaging the institution, she calls her critics racist," Rufo said on X, formerly Twitter. "This is the poison" of diversity, equity and inclusion ideology, said Rufo, who has led conservative attacks on DEI both in business and in education.

Gay, in her letter, said it has been "distressing to have doubt cast on my commitments to confronting hate and to upholding scholarly rigor—two bedrock values that are fundamental to who I am—and frightening to be subjected to personal attacks and threats fueled by racial animus."

But Gay, who is returning to the school's faculty, added "it has become clear that it is in the best interests of Harvard for me to resign so that our community can navigate this moment of extraordinary challenge."

Yoel Zimmermann, a visiting research undergrad from Munich, Germany, studying physics at Harvard, said that as a Jewish student he's noticed fellow members of the Jewish community have felt uncomfortable with the climate on campus.

"I think it was about time that Claudine Gay resigned," Zimmerman said. "She just did too many things wrong, especially with her testimony in Congress. I think that was just the kind of final tipping point that should have led to her removal immediately."

Supporters of Gay lamented her resignation.

"Racist mobs won't stop until they topple all Black people from positions of power and influence who are not reinforcing the structure of racism," award-winning author Ibram X. Kendi, who survived scrutiny of an antiracist research center he founded at Boston University, said in an Instagram post.

The Rev. Al Sharpton in a statement called pressure for Gay to resign "an attack on every Black woman in this country who's put a crack in the glass ceiling" and an "assault on the health, strength, and future of diversity, equity, and inclusion."

## Trump's vows to deport millions undercut by his White House record, one family's story

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Noelia Sanchez was born in the rolling farmlands of southwest Missouri, where her Mexican parents worked as seasonal farmworkers in the 1950s.

When she was 1, Noelia and her mother, Aurora, who had no work documents, were rounded up with dozens of other immigrants in a Texas town near the border. The U.S.-born child and her mother were forced to go to Mexico along with hundreds of thousands of other people.

Their deportations were part of a U.S. government effort that was known in official papers and the media as "Operation Wetback." The term "wetback," which was used to describe Mexicans who swam or waded across the Rio Grande, is considered a racial slur.

Donald Trump has lauded the Eisenhower-era raids without using their name since he first ran for president and is now promising voters he would begin the largest domestic deportation operation in American history, exceeding the 1950s. He has escalated his verbal attacks on immigrants as he seeks a second term, telling supporters twice in recent weeks that immigrants were "poisoning the blood of our country."

People affected by "Operation Wetback" and historians on immigration argue Trump is using fragments of history and rhetoric for political reasons while discounting his own administration's failures to carry out mass deportations, even as it separated families at the U.S.-Mexico border and enacted sweeping restrictions on asylum.

"Families were divided by misapplied immigration policies and discriminatory immigration policies specifically geared toward indigenous people, Mexican Americans, Latinos," said Joaquin Sanchez, Noelia's son, who is now an immigration attorney in Chicago. "These are the types of policies that my family has witnessed for generations."

"Operation Wetback" coincided with a guest worker program that provided legal status to hundreds of thousands of largely Mexican farm workers. Noelia Sanchez, who was born in Missouri, and her mother were able to get their papers in about a year and return to settle in Chicago.

The administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower launched a military-style campaign in the summer of 1954 seeking to remove Mexican immigrants who were in the country illegally. The operation was named after the term "wetback," which was used to describe Mexicans who swam or waded across the Rio Grande, and it followed several other deportation efforts of the 1940s and 1950s.

Scholars have challenged the 1 million arrests reported under that summer operation, saying that they had included figures from previous years and that the number for that entire year was actually much smaller at about 250,000.

## ACROSS THE NATION

### Trump appeals Maine ruling barring him from ballot under Constitution's insurrection clause

**PORTLAND, Maine** (AP)—Former President Donald Trump on Tuesday appealed a ruling by Maine's secretary of state barring him from the state's primary ballot over his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. Trump, the early front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, appealed the Maine decision by Democrat Shenna Bellows, who became the first secretary of state in history to bar someone from running for the presidency under the rarely used Section 3 of the 14th Amendment. That provision prohibits those who "engaged in insurrection" from holding office. The former president is expected to soon appeal a similar ban by the Colorado Supreme Court. That appeal would go to the U.S. Supreme Court, while Bellows' action is being appealed to a Maine Superior Court. Trump's appeal on Tuesday asks that Bellows be required to place him on the March 5 primary ballot. The appeal argues that she abused her discretion and relied on "untrustworthy evidence." "The secretary should have recused herself due to her bias against President Trump, as demonstrated by a documented history of prior statements prejudging the issue presented," Trump's attorneys wrote.

### Prosecutors recommend six months in prison for man at center of a Jan. 6 conspiracy theory

**WASHINGTON** (AP)—Federal prosecutors on Tuesday recommended a six-month term of imprisonment for a man at the center of a right-wing conspiracy theory about the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol—an attack that he has admitted to joining. Ray Epps, who is scheduled to be sentenced next Tuesday, pleaded guilty in September to a misdemeanor charge of disorderly conduct on restricted grounds. Epps, a onetime Donald Trump supporter from Arizona, became the focus of a conspiracy theory that he was an undercover government agent who incited the Capitol attack. Right-wing news outlets amplified the conspiracy theory and drove him into hiding after the Jan. 6 riot. Epps, who worked as a roofer after serving four years as infantry in the U.S. Marine Corps, has vehemently denied ever working for the FBI. Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Gordon said during Epps' plea hearing in September that he was not a confidential source for the FBI "or any other law enforcement agency." Epps, 62, filed a defamation lawsuit against Fox News Channel last year, saying the network was to blame for spreading the baseless claims that led to death threats and bullet casings in his yard.

### Prosecutors say Sen. Menendez cashed in by linking Qatari royal family member with NJ businessman

**NEW YORK** (AP)—U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez used his international clout to help a friend get a multimillion-dollar deal with a Qatari investment fund, partly by taking actions favorable to Qatar's government, federal prosecutors said Tuesday in a revised indictment. The new allegations deepen the legal challenges for Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, who already was charged with wielding his political influence to secretly advance Egypt's interests. The superseding indictment in New York said the senator and his wife accepted bribes of gold bars and cash from New Jersey real estate developer Fred Daibes as a reward for several corrupt acts that included his help securing a major investment from the Qatari fund. Prosecutors said Menendez introduced Daibes to a member of Qatar's royal family who was also a principal in the investment firm, met personally with Qatari officials and made public statements supportive of Qatar while the real estate deal was being negotiated. The indictment said the Qatari investor eventually invested tens of millions of dollars in Daibes' development project, in a deal finalized in 2023.

# Asia

## Deaths from Japan quakes rise to 62

**SUZU, Japan** (AP)—A series of powerful earthquakes that hit western Japan left at least 62 people dead as rescue workers fought Wednesday to save those feared trapped under the rubble of collapsed buildings.

Aftershocks continued to shake Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas two days after a magnitude 7.6 temblor slammed the area. The first 72 hours are considered crucial to save lives after disasters.

Water, power and cell phone service were still down in some areas. Residents expressed sorrow about their uncertain futures.

"It's not just that it's a mess. The wall has collapsed, and you can see through to the next room. I don't think we can live here anymore," Miki Kobayashi, an Ishikawa resident, said as she swept around her house.

The house was also damaged in a 2007 quake, she said.

Of the deaths, 29 were counted in Wajima city, while 22 people died in Suzu, according to Ishikawa Prefectural authorities. Dozens of people have been seriously injured, including in nearby prefectures.

Although casualty numbers continued to climb gradually, the prompt public warnings, relayed on broadcasts and phones, and the quick response from the general public and officials appeared to have limited some of the damage.

Toshitaka Katada, a University of Tokyo professor specializing in disasters, said people were prepared because the area had been hit by quakes in recent years. They had evacuation plans and emergency supplies in stock.

"There are probably no people on Earth who are as disaster-ready as the Japanese," he told The Associated Press.

Japan is frequently hit by earthquakes because of its location along the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin.

Katada warned the situation remains precarious and unpredictable. The March 2011 quake and tsunami in northeastern Japan had been preceded by other quakes.

"This is far from over," Katada said.

Predictions by scientists have repeatedly been proven wrong, such as with the 2016 quake in southwestern Kumamoto, an area previously seen as relatively quake-free.

"Having too much confidence in the power of science is very dangerous. We are dealing with nature," Katada said.

Japanese media's aerial footage showed widespread damage in the hardest-hit spots, with landslides burying roads, boats tossed in the waters and a fire that had turned an entire section of Wajima city to ashes.

Japan's military has dispatched 1,000 soldiers to the disaster zones to join rescue efforts. It was uncertain how many more victims might still be in the rubble.

Nuclear regulators said several nuclear plants in the region were operating normally. A major quake and tsunami in 2011 caused three reactors to melt and release large amounts of radiation at a nuclear plant in northeastern Japan.

On Monday, the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, as well as for the northern island of Hokkaido.

The warning was downgraded several hours later, and all tsunami warnings were lifted as of early Tuesday. Waves measuring more than one meter (3 feet) hit some places.

Still, half-sunken ships floated in bays where tsunami waves had rolled in, leaving a muddied coastline.

People who were evacuated from their houses huddled in auditoriums, schools and community centers. Bullet trains in the region were halted, but service was mostly restored. Sections of highways were closed.

Weather forecasters predicted rain, setting off worries about crumbling buildings and infrastructure.

The region includes tourist spots famous for lacquerware and other traditional crafts, along with designated cultural heritage sites.

## ASIAN BRIEFS

### Sister of N. Korean leader derides S. Korea's president but praises predecessor

**SEOUL, South Korea** (AP)—The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has derided South Korea's conservative president for being "foolishly brave" but called his liberal predecessor "very smart"—rhetoric likely meant to help stoke domestic divisions in South Korea. Her statement Tuesday came as a response to South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's New Year's Day address, in which he said he would bolster South Korea's military capability and enhance its alliance with the United States to cope with North Korea's evolving nuclear threats. Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has made such comments numerous times. Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, used Yoon's latest remarks as an opportunity to fire off derisive rhetoric against him. "This person … has persistently called for 'peace by force' and got hell-bent on the beefing up of the extended deterrence and the South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises, thus putting the destiny of (South Korea) on the last extremity," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media. Some observers say she may be seeking to boost anti-Yoon sentiments in South Korea among those opposing his North Korea policy ahead of April's parliamentary elections.

### Planes collide and catch fire at Japan's busy Haneda airport, killing 5

**TOKYO** (AP)—A large passenger plane and a Japanese coast guard aircraft collided on the runway at Tokyo's Haneda Airport on Tuesday and burst into flames, killing five people aboard the coast guard plane, officials said. All 379 people on Japan Airlines flight JAL-516 got out safely before the Airbus A350 was fully engulfed in flames, Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito confirmed. The pilot of the coast guard's Bombardier Dash-8 plane escaped but the five crew members died, Saito said. The aircraft was preparing to take off to deliver aid to an area affected by a major earthquake on Monday, officials said. Television footage showed an orange fireball erupting from the Japan Airlines plane as it collided while landing, and the airliner then spewed smoke from its side as it continued down the runway. Within 20 minutes, all passengers and crew members slid down emergency chutes to get away. As firefighters tried to put out the blaze with streams of water, the area around the passenger plane's wing caught fire. The flames spread throughout the plane, which eventually collapsed. The fire was extinguished after about six hours. Tuesday's accident was the first severe damage to an Airbus A350, among the industry's newest large passenger planes. It entered commercial service in 2015. Airbus said in a statement it was sending specialists to help Japanese and French officials investigating the accident, and that the plane was delivered to Japan Airlines in late 2021.

# World

## Apparent Israeli strike kills senior Hamas figure in Beirut

AP

Civil defense workers search for survivors inside an apartment following a massive explosion in the southern suburb of Beirut, Lebanon, Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024.

### » Raises fears conflict could expand

**BEIRUT** (AP)—An apparent Israeli strike in the Lebanese capital of Beirut killed Hamas' No. 2 political leader Tuesday, marking a potentially significant escalation of Israel's war against the militant group and heightening the risk of a wider Middle East conflict.

Saleh Arouri, who was the most senior Hamas figure killed since the war with Israel began, was also a founder of the group's military wing. His death could provoke major retaliation by Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah militia.

The strike hit an apartment in a building in a Shiite district of Beirut that is a Hezbollah stronghold, and Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has vowed to strike back against any Israeli targeting of Palestinian officials in Lebanon.

Hezbollah and the Israeli military have been exchanging fire almost daily over the Israeli-Lebanese border since Israel's military campaign in Gaza began nearly three months ago. But so far the Lebanese group has appeared reluctant to dramatically escalate the fighting. A significant response now could send the conflict spiraling into all-out war on Israel's northern border.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said the strike was carried out by an Israeli drone, and Israeli officials declined to comment. Speaking to reporters, Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari did not directly mention Arouri's death but said, "We are focused and remain focused on fighting against Hamas."

"We are on high readiness for any scenario," he added.

The killing comes ahead of a visit to the region by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, even as the United States has tried to prevent a spread of the conflict, repeatedly warning Hezbollah—and its regional supporter, Iran—not to escalate the violence.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the assault in Gaza until Hamas is crushed and the more than 100 hostages still held by the militant group in Gaza are freed, which he has said could take several more months. At the same time, Israeli officials have increasingly warned in recent days of stepped-up action against Hezbollah unless its cross-border fire stops.

## Russian missiles hit Ukrainian cities, killing 5 and injuring at least 130, Kyiv officials say

**KYIV, Ukraine** (AP)—Ukraine's two largest cities came under attack early Tuesday from Russian missiles that killed five people and injured as many as 130, officials said, as the war approached its two-year mark and the Kremlin stepped up its winter bombardment of urban areas.

Air defenses shot down all 10 of the Russian Kinzhal missiles, which can fly at 10 times the speed of sound, out of about 100 of various types that were launched, said Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Ukraine's commander-in-chief.

But other missiles got through in Kyiv and in Kharkiv, the provincial capital of the northeastern region. In Kyiv and its surrounding region, four people were killed and about 70 were wounded, while in the Kharkiv region, one person was killed and about 60 were hurt, the Interior Ministry said.

The Kh-47M2 Kinzhal is an air-launched ballistic missile that is rarely used by Russian forces due to its cost and limited stocks. The barrage fired Tuesday was the highest number used in one attack since the start of the war, Ukraine air force spokesperson Yurii Ihnat said.

The latest round of attacks by Russia began Friday with its largest single assault on Ukraine of the war, as fighting along the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line has subsided into grinding attrition amid winter. At least 41 civilians were killed since the weekend.

At a nine-story Kyiv apartment building where two people were killed, 48-year-old Inna Luhina was getting ready for work when a blast shattered her windows and she and other family members, including her 80-year-old mother, were struck by flying glass.

More than 100 survivors gathered at a school set up as a temporary shelter.

Iryna Dzyhil, a 55-year-old resident of the same building, said the explosion threw her and her husband from their chairs, and a subsequent fire trapped them on the top floor until emergency crews rescued them via the roof.

# Environment

AP

1 This image released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows a flower from a shrub known as marrón bacora on March 21, 2021. 2 This image released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows a Stephens' kangaroo rat is seen on a person's knee as it's held by the tail on Oct. 16, 2017. They have fur-lined external cheek pouches used to transport seeds and large hind legs used for jumping. 3 This August 2017 photo provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows a winter-run Chinook salmon.

# Most money for endangered species goes to small number of creatures

**BILLINGS, Mont.** (AP)—Since passage of the Endangered Species Act 50 years ago, more than 1,700 plants, mammals, fish, insects and other species in the U.S. have been listed as threatened or endangered with extinction. Yet federal government data reveals striking disparities in how much money is allocated to save various biological kingdoms.

Of the roughly $1.2 billion a year spent on endangered and threatened species, about half goes toward recovery of just two types of fish: salmon and steelhead trout along the West Coast. Tens of millions of dollars go to other widely known animals including manatees, right whales, grizzly bears and spotted owls.

But the large sums directed toward a handful of species means others have gone neglected, in some cases for decades, as they teeter on potential extinction.

At the bottom of the spending list is the tiny Virginia fringed mountain snail, which had $100 spent on its behalf in 2020, according to the most recent data available. The underground-dwelling snail has been seen only once in the past 35 years, according to government records, yet it remains a step ahead of more than 200 imperiled plants, animals, fish and other creatures that had nothing spent on their behalf.

With climate change increasing threats to organisms around the planet and adding to the number that qualify for protection under the Endangered Species Act, government officials are struggling in many cases to execute recovery actions required under the law.

Some scientists even argue for spending less on costly efforts that may not work and putting the money toward species with less expensive recovery plans that have languished.

"For a tiny fraction of the budget going to spotted owls, we could save whole species of cacti that are less charismatic but have an order of magnitude smaller budget," said Leah Gerber, a professor of conservation science at Arizona State University.

An Associated Press analysis of 2020 data found fish got 67% of the spending, the majority for several dozen salmon and steelhead populations in California, Oregon and Washington. Mammals were a distant second with 7% of spending and birds had about 5%. Insects received just 0.5% of the money and plants about 2%. Not included in those percentages is money divided among multiple species.

Species drawing no spending at all included stoneflies threatened by climate change in Montana's Glacier National Park, the stocky California tiger salamander that has lost ground to development and flowering plants such as the scrub lupine around Orlando, Florida, where native habitat has been converted for theme parks.

Such spending inequities are longstanding and reflect a combination of biological realities and political pressures. Restoring salmon and steelhead populations is expensive because they are widespread and hemmed in by massive hydroelectric dams. They also have a broad political constituency with Native American tribes and commercial fishing interests that want fisheries restored.

Congress over decades has sent massive sums of money to agencies such as the Bonneville Power Administration that operate dams along rivers the fish once traveled up to spawn. The money pays for fish ladders around dams, habitat restoration projects, monitoring by scientists and other needs.

More than half the species protected under the Endangered Species Act are plants, but the entire plant kingdom was almost excluded from the landmark conservation law when it was adopted in 1973, according to the Congressional Record and Faith Campbell, who interviewed people involved in the bill's passage for a 1988 study published in the Pace Environmental Law Review.

Plants initially were left out when the measure passed the Senate, with opposition led by influential Republican Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska. They were added back at the 11th hour following a push by botanists from the Smithsonian Institution and Lee Talbot, a senior scientist at the White House Council on Environmental Quality, according to Campbell.

Botanists at the time proposed more than 2,500 plants as threatened with future extinction. However, most failed to get protections because federal officials failed to act prior to a Congressional deadline.

Today more than 900 trees, ferns, flowers and other flora are protected. Combined, they received about $26 million in 2020.

"In terms of numbers they're catching up, but as far as money and attention they're still not getting their share," said Campbell, a longtime environmental advocate who now works at the Center for Invasive Species Prevention. "The threats are serious, they're the same as the threats to animals. Yet they don't have the political clout of, say, a couple dozen of the big animal species that attract favorable attention or get in people's way."

Most plants receive less money than recommended under their recovery plans, according to Gerber and others. Researchers say that has direct consequences: species tend to decline when allocated less funding than needed, while they have a higher chance of recovery when receiving enough money.

Gerber has suggested redirecting some money from species getting more than their recovery plans seek—the bull trout, the gopher tortoise and the Northern spotted owl among them—to those receiving little or none. Her ideas have stirred pushback from some conservationists.

Former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark said debating how to allocate scarce resources for rescuing endangered species is a distraction.

"The issue is not where the money is spent," said Clark, now president of Defenders of Wildlife. "The issue is that there isn't nearly enough of it."

Gerber said she doesn't want to let anything go extinct but that a strategic approach is needed with the shortage of resources.

"Unfortunately, the clock is ticking," she added. "We need to take action."

Wildlife officials say they are trying to do just that with money for endangered species in the climate law signed last year by President Joe Biden.

It included $62.5 million officials said will allow them to hire biologists to craft recovery plans to guide future conservation work, initially for 32 species and for as many as 300 over coming years.

Among them are a colorful fish known as the candy darter that lives in rivers in the southeastern U.S., a flowering shrub from the Virgin Islands called marron bacora, the Panama City crayfish of Florida and the pocket-sized Stephens' kangaroo rat in southern California.

The extra money is intended to provide some relief after the agency's environmental review staff fell 20% over the past two decades, even while new species were listed, according to officials. Increased funding is especially important because more than half the agency's existing recovery plans are more than two decades old, according to Lindsay Rosa, vice president for conservation research at Defenders of Wildlife.

Also in the law was $5.1 million for recovery projects that could benefit hundreds of species from four groups that officials said have historically been underfunded: Hawaii and Pacific island plants, butterflies and moths, freshwater mussels and desert fish in the southwestern U.S.

"Each of these species are part of this larger web of life," Fish and Wildlife Service Director Martha Williams said in an interview. "They're all important."

# Life & Style

## Trial of man charged with stabbing Salman Rushdie may be delayed

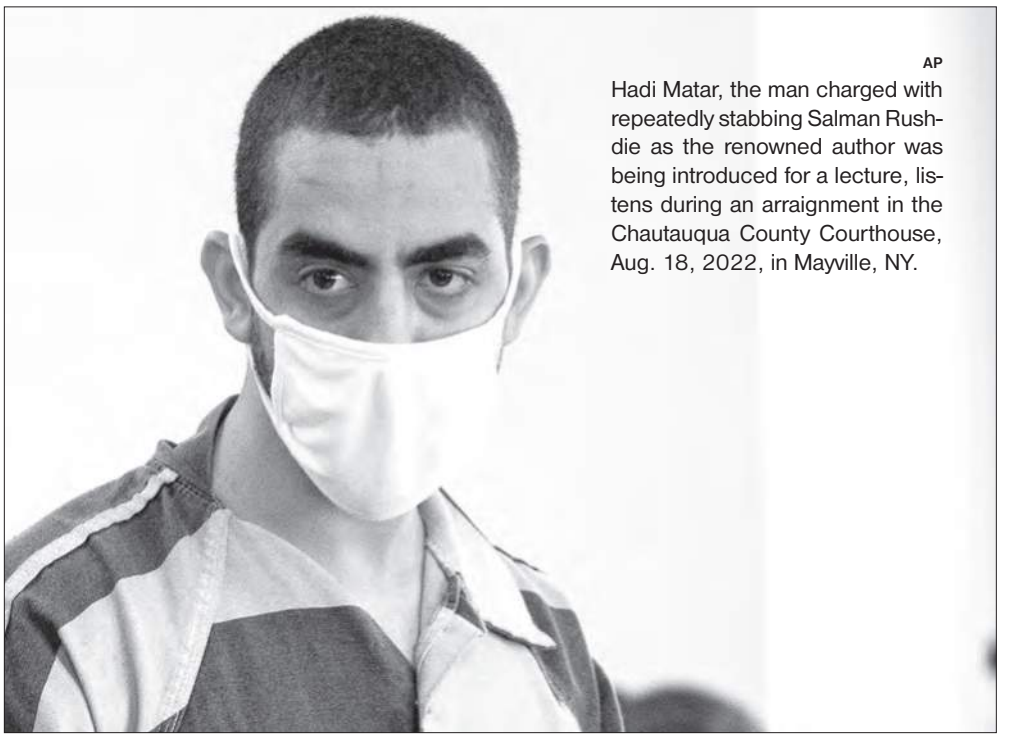
**MAYVILLE, N.Y.** (AP)—Salman Rushdie's plans to publish a book about a 2022 attempt on his life may delay the trial of his alleged attacker, which is scheduled to begin next week, attorneys said Tuesday.

Hadi Matar, the man charged with repeatedly stabbing Rushdie as the author was being introduced for a lecture, is entitled to the manuscript and related material as part of his trial preparation, Chautauqua County Judge David Foley said during a pretrial conference.

Foley gave Matar and his attorney until Wednesday to decide if they want to delay the trial until they have the book in hand, either in advance from the publisher or once it has been released in April. Defense attorney Nathaniel Barone said after court that he favored a delay but would consult with Matar.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin Jan. 8.

"It's not just the book," Barone said. "Every little note Rushdie wrote down, I get, I'm entitled to. Every discussion, every recording, anything he did in regard to this book."



AP

Hadi Matar, the man charged with repeatedly stabbing Salman Rushdie as the renowned author was being introduced for a lecture, listens during an arraignment in the Chautauqua County Courthouse, Aug. 18, 2022, in Mayville, NY.

Rushdie, who was left blinded in his right eye and with a damaged left hand in the August 2022 attack, announced in October that he had written about the attack in a memoir: "Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder," which is available for pre-order. Trial preparation was already well under way when the attorneys involved in the case learned about the book.

District Attorney Jason Schmidt said Rushdie's representatives had declined the prosecutor's request for a copy of the manuscript, citing intellectual property rights. Schmidt downplayed the relevance of the book at the upcoming trial, given that the attack was witnessed by a large, live audience and Rushdie himself could testify.

"There were recordings of it," Schmidt said of the assault.

Matar, 26, of New Jersey has been held without bail since his arrest immediately after Rushdie was stabbed in front of a stunned audience at the Chautauqua Institution, a summer arts and education retreat in western New York.

Schmidt has said Matar was on a "mission to kill Mr. Rushdie" when he rushed from the audience to the stage and stabbed him more than a dozen times until being subdued by onlookers.

## Witness threat claim delays bail hearing for ex-gang leader held in Tupac Shakur killing

**LAS VEGAS** (AP)—A bail hearing was postponed Tuesday in Las Vegas for a former Los Angeles-area gang leader charged with orchestrating the killing of hip-hop music legend Tupac Shakur in 1996, giving defense attorneys time to respond to prosecutors' allegations that witnesses in the case may be at risk.

Duane "Keffe D" Davis' court-appointed attorneys sought the delay to respond to prosecutors' allegations, filed last week, that jail telephone recordings and a list of names provided to Davis' family members show that Davis poses a threat to the public if he is released.

No court hearing was held Tuesday. One of Davis' attorneys, Robert Arroyo, told The Associated Press later that the defense wanted to respond in court in writing. He declined to provide details. Arroyo said last week he did not see evidence that any witness had been named or threatened.

Davis is the only person ever charged with a crime in the drive-by shooting that also wounded rap music mogul Marion "Suge" Knight, who is now serving 28 years in a California prison for an unrelated fatal shooting in the Los Angeles area in 2015.

Davis has pleaded not guilty and is due for trial in June on a murder charge. He has remained jailed without bail since his arrest Sept. 29 outside his Henderson home. Las Vegas police had served a search warrant there in mid-July.

Davis, originally from Compton, California, is now housed at the Clark County Detention Center in Las Vegas, where detainees' phone calls are routinely recorded. If convicted at trial, he could spend the rest of his life in prison.

In a recording of an October jail call, prosecutors say Davis' son told the defendant about a "green light" authorization. Their court filing made no reference to Davis instructing anyone to harm someone, or to anyone associated with the case being physically harmed.

## SHOWBIZ TIDBITS

### ESPN apologizes for showing video of woman flashing breast during Sugar Bowl broadcast

**NEW ORLEANS** (AP)—ESPN apologized Monday night for a video clip of a woman baring her breast that was shown during the broadcast of the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans. It was aired coming out of a commercial during the second half of Washington's 37-31 victory over Texas in a semifinal game of the College Football Playoff. A clip of people wandering on Bourbon Street in New Orleans showed a woman pulling down her top to expose her breast. "We regret that this happened and apologize that the video aired in the telecast," ESPN's Bill Hofheimer said in a statement to The Associated Press.

### 'Bachelorette' Rachel Lindsay's husband, Bryan Abasolo, files for divorce after 4 years of marriage

**LOS ANGELES** (AP)—The bloom is off the final rose for "Bachelorette" star Rachel Lindsay and husband Bryan Abasolo, who found love on the reality dating show. Court records show that Abasolo filed to end their marriage Tuesday. He cited irreconcilable differences for the breakup and his filing in Los Angeles Superior Court says the pair separated on Dec. 31. "After more than 4 years of marriage, Rachel and I have made the difficult decision to part ways and start anew," Abasolo said in a statement posted to his Instagram account. "Sometimes loving yourself and your partner means you must let go." After competing on Season 21 of "The Bachelor," Lindsay gained fame as the first Black lead on any iteration of "The Bachelor" franchise when she was picked as "The Bachelorette" in 2017. She chose Abasolo as her winning suitor and they married in August 2019.

### Ex-celebrity lawyer Tom Girardi found competent to stand trial for alleged $15 million client thefts

**LOS ANGELES** (AP)—Disgraced Los Angeles celebrity lawyer Tom Girardi has been found competent to stand trial on charges that he stole more than $15 million from his clients. A federal judge filed a notice of the brief order Tuesday under seal. Lawyers for both sides were given five days to identify any information in it that they would like the judge to keep confidential. Girardi, 84, is the estranged husband of "The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" star Erika Jayne. Girardi pleaded not guilty in Los Angeles last year to wire fraud on charges that he embezzled from clients.

## Silence from daughters hurts divorced father

**DEAR ABBY**: I am the father of four, two boys and two girls, ranging in age from late teens to mid-20s. I was extremely close with all of them until my divorce seven years ago. Most would say they were closer to me than to their mom.

My boys still talk to me, and we have a great relationship, but my two girls stopped talking to me. To this day, I send each of them a check for $150 on their birthdays and on Christmas. The girls sure do cash their checks, but they never send a text or email a thank you.

My feelings border on deep hurt and anger. Should I send one last check explaining how they have hurt me and tell them goodbye, or continue sending checks, hoping they'll contact me in the future? It isn't easy for me to afford $150 eight times a year.

DEEPLY HURT DAD IN ARIZONA

**DEAR DEEPLY HURT: You have been generous with all of your children in spite of the fact it creates financial stress. Your ex may have turned the girls against you by telling them you had left THEM instead of HER at the time of your divorce.**

**That you have not heard from them to say, "Thanks, Dad," is a breach of manners. It isn't necessary to send them a letter telling them their shunning you has hurt you. They already know that. When the next gift-giving occasion rolls around, send your daughters a nice card acknowledging the special day and omit the checks. If you do, you may hear from them then.**

■■■

**DEAR ABBY**: My co-worker sent "save the date" cards to everyone a year ago, and my husband and I were looking forward to attending her wedding. Apparently, she had a wedding planner or a friend send the wedding invitation itself via email closer to the wedding date. Everyone in the office received theirs, but I did not.

When I found out, I privately told two other co-workers I hadn't received an invitation and that perhaps the person misspelled my name in the email, thinking they would say something to the bride or someone would follow up on the RSVP. (I didn't want to put the bride on the spot by addressing her directly.) Well, nothing happened.

Now everyone in the office is gushing with the bride about how wonderful her wedding was, and I'm afraid she may think I didn't care to attend and or even bother to RSVP. Was there a polite way to let the bride know I didn't receive an emailed wedding invitation without looking desperate or embarrassing her? Are emailed invitations the "new thing" with weddings?

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

**DEAR OUTSIDE: Some couples do send emailed wedding and shower invitations these days. A way to have handled this would have been for YOU to have been proactive and informed the bride that you had "checked your calendar" and realized that after having received her "save the date" memo, your formal invitation hadn't shown up. That way she could have told you she'd send one immediately, or that because of budgetary considerations, she would be unable to host you after all.**

■■■

*To receive a collection of Abby's most memorable – and most frequently requested – poems and essays, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby – Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)*

## DEAR ABBY

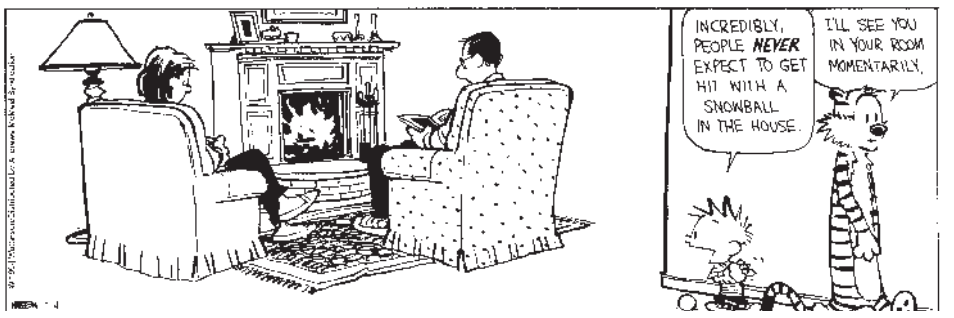
By Abigail Van Buren
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

*Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.*

# Pastimes

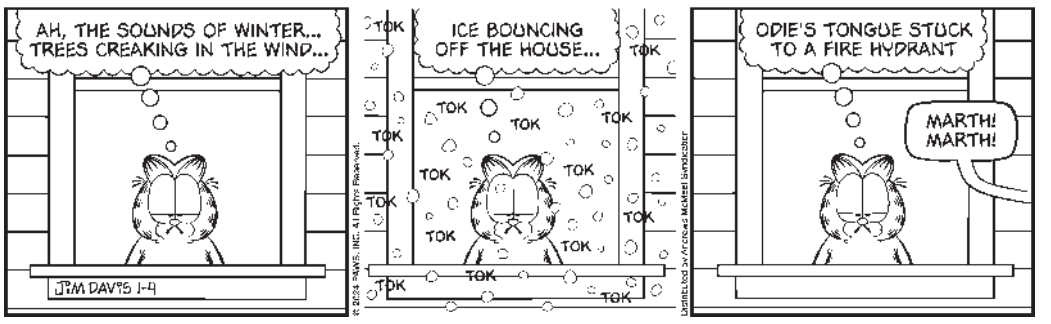
## Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson



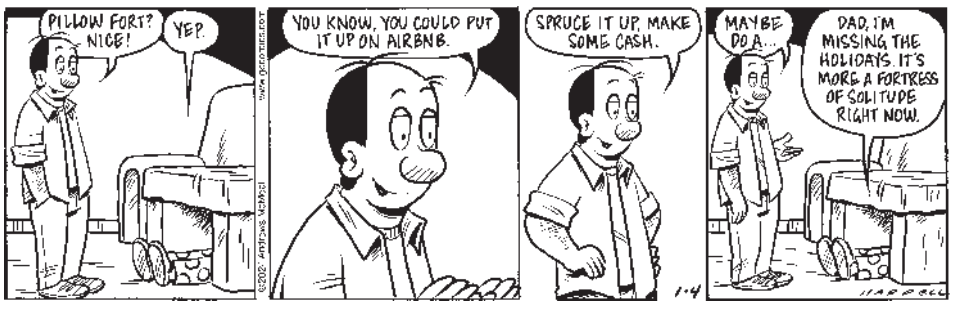

## Garfield®

By Jim Davis


AH, THE SOUNDS OF WINTER... TREES CREAKING IN THE WIND...
ICE BOUNCING OFF THE HOUSE...
TOK
ODIE'S TONGUE STUCK TO A FIRE HYDRANT
MARTH! MARTH!
JIM DAVIS 1-4

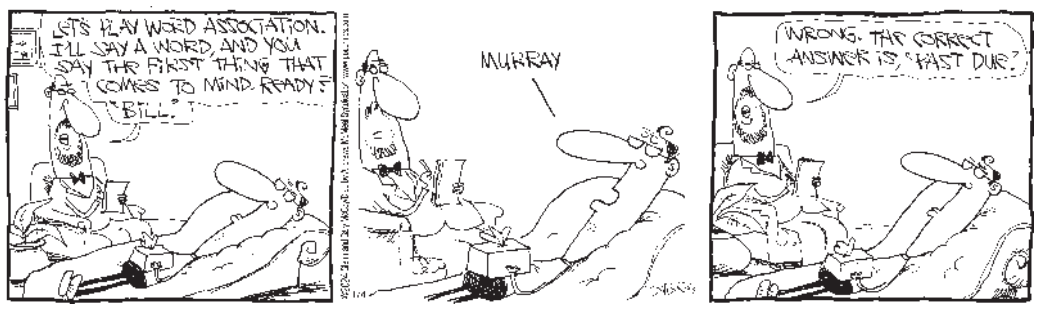
## Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


PILLOW FORT? NICE! YEP.
YOU KNOW, YOU COULD PUT IT UP ON AIRBNB.
SPRUCE IT UP, MAKE SOME CASH.
MAYBE DO A...
DAD, I'M MISSING THE HOLIDAYS. IT'S MORE A FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE RIGHT NOW.
1-4

## The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy


LET'S PLAY WORD ASSOCIATION. I'LL SAY A WORD, AND YOU SAY THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND. READY? "BILL."
MURRAY
WRONG. THE CORRECT ANSWER IS "PAST DUE."

## CROSSWORD

*By Eugene Sheffer*

**ACROSS**
1 Barbie's companion
4 Smear
8 "Mamma Mia" group
12 "— had it!"
13 Within (Pref.)
14 Weaving frame
15 Group of fresh recruits
17 — -pedi
18 In shape
19 Canceled
21 Campaign phrase
24 Day light?
25 "Law & Order: —"
26 Bro, maybe
28 Handled
32 Shade
34 Ballot markings
36 Scorch
37 Factions
39 Highland hat
41 Celestial altar
42 Snooze
44 Milk container
46 Cake in the shower
50 Dorm VIPs
51 Antioxidant berry
52 In mint condition
56 Houston baseballer, briefly
57 Single
58 Blunder
59 Sharp
60 Poet Khayyám
61 Method

**DOWN**
1 Family
2 Night before the big day
3 Recently discovered
4 River formations
5 Yucatan year
6 Japanese noodle
7 Portends
8 Fact book
9 Tub toy
10 Dog's treasure
11 During
16 Huge
20 Gloomy guy
21 Swift jets
22 Roman 57
23 Veto
27 Wager
29 Conversation starter
30 Tropical tuber
31 Algerian port
33 Tautness
35 Pouch
38 — Paulo, Brazil
40 Eliot's Silas
43 Cellist Casals
45 "Awesome!"
46 Soak up the sun
47 Part of a French play
48 Scarce
49 High school dance
53 Comedian Gasteyer
54 Mound stat
55 Like some humor

**Solution time: 24 mins.**

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| E | E | K | ■ | E | V | E | R | ■ | E | L | I | E |
| N | A | E | ■ | B | A | L | L | E | R | I | N | A |
| S | N | A | F | U | ■ | ■ | O | R | B | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| ■ | ■ | ■ | D | I | F | F | S | ■ | S | A | L | A | D |
| C | A | T | A | L | I | N | A | ■ | L | I | M | A |
| O | R | E | ■ | T | E | C | M | S | ■ | L | C | D |
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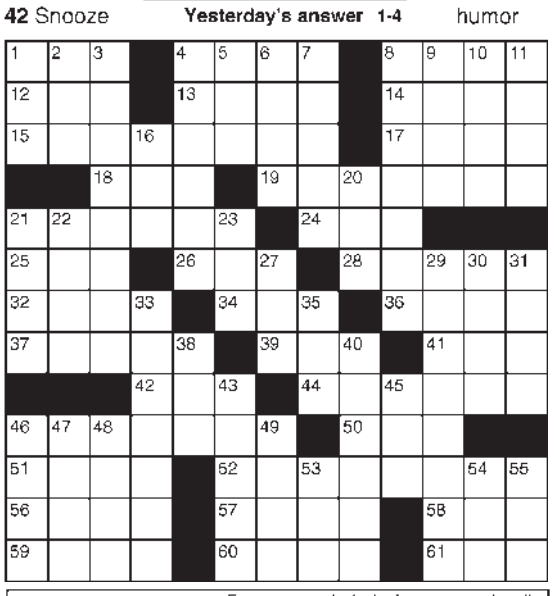
| A | N | A | I | ■ | S | O | L | O | ■ | E | E | L |

**Yesterday's answer 1-4**



**STUMPED?** For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

**CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY**: Dot-Marie Jones, 60; Dave Foley, 61; Michael Stipe, 64; Patty Loveless, 67.

**Happy Birthday**: Rely on your intelligence, not your emotions. Learn from experience, and you'll find a path that leads to victory. Embrace change and look for opportunities that help stabilize prospects and encourage better relationships with loved ones. Research and discover the truth before you voice your opinion or get involved in something that can restrict you from reaching your target. Study and learn, and navigate your way to success. Your numbers are 6, 17, 22, 29, 34, 36, 42.

**ARIES** *(March 21-April 19)*: Pay attention to how you feel physically, and streamline how you handle your finances. Staying on top of stressful matters will be a game changer when you want to make a move. Listen to your inner voice and follow your heart. Romance is on the rise. ✪✪✪

**TAURUS** *(April 20-May 20)*: Change is inevitable. Make a move that positions you for success. If you vacillate, someone will take advantage of you and your expertise. Have a plan and move forward alone if it makes more sense. Deal with a money or contractual matter quickly. ✪✪✪

**GEMINI** *(May 21-June 20)*: Pivot and head in a comfortable direction. A partnership will entice you, but first, ensure you are on the same page and that the cost involved isn't one-sided. A relationship that is balanced mentally, emotionally and financially will ward off uncertainty. 5 stars

**CANCER** *(June 21-July 22)*: Emotional uncertainty will hold you back. Don't be shy; ask direct questions, find out where you stand and proceed confidently. Knowing what you want and how to get it will alleviate stress and encourage others to help you reach your goal. Trust your instincts. ✪✪

**LEO** *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Mix business with pleasure, and you'll make an interesting connection, but first verify the information you receive to see if it's viable. Taking what you discover and marketing it to work for your purposes may be a better alternative than joining forces. Personal gain looks promising. ✪✪✪✪

**VIRGO** *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: Explore what's available in your neighborhood. Meet-and-greet activities will lead to a host of interests that could allow you to network with people with something to offer in return. A learning experience will lead to an unexpected opportunity. ✪✪✪

**LIBRA** *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Emotions will surface and, if dealt with swiftly, will ward off tension. Holding back information won't benefit you. Consider what concerns you most and suggest changes that could fix what's not working and set you on a path toward financial security. Romance is favored. ✪✪✪

**SCORPIO** *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: An honest discussion regarding shared expenses or projects will help alleviate mistakes or the mishandling of matters. Change is inevitable and, if implemented with good intentions, will benefit everyone. Consider options that ignite stability. Hard work and fair play will lead to opportunity. ✪✪✪

**SAGITTARIUS** *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Protect your interests and make moves that help you advance. Listen, but don't take what you hear to heart. Someone will mislead you if you appear gullible. Don't take a risk that can result in physical limitations. Take care of your health and well-being. ✪✪✪✪

## EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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**CAPRICORN** *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Factor in what others want before making lifestyle changes. Having a backup will add strength when putting your plan in place. Make sure you have estimates in writing before you begin. A hidden agenda or lack of information will stop you in your tracks. ✪✪

**AQUARIUS** *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: Define your goal and set up a financial plan encouraging success. Don't let anything discourage or stand in your way. Keep your eye on your destination and distance yourself from counterproductive people. Your objective is to stay on track. ✪✪✪✪✪

**PISCES** *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: At the first sign of interference, walk away. You must focus on your objective to come out on top. Someone will use seductive means to lead you astray. Put your energy where it will enhance your chance to surpass your expectations. ✪✪✪

**Birthday Baby**: You are outspoken, forceful and unpredictable. You are ambitious and persistent.

*✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.*

# SUDOKU

**Conceptis Sudoku** *By Dave Green*

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 4 | | | 7 | | | 5 |
| | 8 | | | | | | 9 | |
| | 6 | | | | 8 | 7 | | 1 |
| | 1 | | | 3 | 9 | 2 | | |
| | 4 | 5 | | 6 | 1 | | | 9 |
| 3 | | 6 | | | 4 | 1 | | 8 |
| | | | 6 | 8 | | | 1 | |
| | | | 4 | | | | 2 | |
| | 5 | 3 | | | 2 | 8 | 6 | 4 |

Difficulty: ★★★ 1/4

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

**Yesterday's Answer**

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 5 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 8 |
| 9 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 7 |
| 3 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 4 |
| 4 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 1 |
| 8 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 9 |
| 6 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 2 |
| 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| 5 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 3 |

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Difficulty: ★★★ 1/4

## WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

**HOW TO PLAY:** All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the WONDERWORD.

**TEXAS RANGERS ARE WORLD CHAMPS!** **Solution: 8 letters**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | N | N | O | I | T | I | S | O | P | Y | H | C | O | B |
| D | N | A | A | N | N | O | U | N | C | E | R | E | D | A |
| G | R | F | C | N | S | T | A | D | I | U | M | R | I | S |
| R | S | O | I | I | W | H | I | M | I | A | I | R | A | E |
| O | E | N | F | E | R | D | U | H | G | H | L | E | M | B |
| S | G | R | E | D | L | E | I | F | T | U | O | G | O | A |
| S | D | S | D | A | A | D | M | G | F | I | N | A | N | L |
| M | E | H | V | I | C | R | E | A | S | U | M | E | D | L |
| A | H | O | C | E | R | R | B | R | J | N | Y | S | B | R |
| N | E | R | N | E | E | T | A | V | E | R | A | S | A | E |
| C | A | T | T | Ⓗ | Ⓘ | Ⓣ | Ⓢ | E | N | A | R | F | C | H |
| G | E | S | C | E | F | I | L | R | S | A | G | U | K | C |
| R | O | T | W | S | I | V | A | D | Y | A | R | R | S | T |
| R | A | O | P | P | O | N | E | N | T | B | H | U | D | I |
| C | L | P | O | S | T | S | E | A | S | O | N | C | D | P |

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American, Announcer, Baseball, Bochy, Bradford, Bruce, Catcher, Center, Chase, Diamondbacks, Duran, Eovaldi, Fans, Game, Garcia, Garver, Gray, Grossman, Hedges, Heim, Hits, Huff, Infielder, Innings, Jung, Life, Lowe, Opponent, Outfielder, Pitcher, Position, Postseason, Ray Davis, Roster, Seager, Shortstop, Smith, Stadium, Taveras, Third

**Yesterday's Answer: Buttons**

The NEW **Treasury 57** can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com, or call 1-800-642-6480. (In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

# Morant scores 26 points as Grizzlies pull away from Spurs

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.** (AP)—Ja Morant had 26 points, 10 assists and a fourth-quarter dunk over Victor Wembanyama, Desmond Bane added 24 points and the Memphis Grizzlies used a second-half spurt to beat the San Antonio Spurs 106-98 on Tuesday night.

Santi Aldama added 13 points and 11 rebounds for Memphis, which snapped a three-game losing streak

Wembanyama led the Spurs with 20 points, seven rebounds and four blocks. Keldon Johnson finished with 19 points, along with six rebounds and four assists. Julian Champagnie and Jeremy Sochan scored 12 points apiece.

Morant brought the Memphis crowd to its feet with 9:11 left as he drove down the right side of the lane, cut left into the middle and dunked on the 7-foot-3 rookie from France, who leads the NBA in blocked shots. The dunk led to a scream, a shake of the head from Morant and an 88-70 lead for the Grizzlies.

"Good player. Very small, so it's hard to catch up with him," Wembanyama said. "Very fast. Just another great player that I see every night in the NBA."

Despite the crowd's anticipation each time Morant matched up against Wembanyama, the Grizzlies guard said there wasn't any extra incentive to challenge the No. 1 pick.

"The moment was just like any other moment for me when somebody is guarding me," Morant said, adding: "I don't try to dunk on people like I used to. Just get a bucket. Find a way."

Memphis held the Spurs to 42% shooting and forced 16 turnovers.

"I think we were communicating pretty effectively," Aldama said. "We were following the game plan discipline, something we've been lacking. I think we just let our defense dictate our offense, and we played very hard. When we play that way, it's very hard to beat us."

AP

Memphis Grizzlies guard Ja Morant (12) shoots against San Antonio Spurs center Victor Wembanyama (1) in the second half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024, in Memphis, Tenn.

## THUNDER 127, CELTICS 123

**OKLAHOMA CITY** (AP)—Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 36 points and the Oklahoma City Thunder held off the NBA-leading Boston Celtics 127-123 on Tuesday night for their fifth straight win.

Josh Giddey had 23 points, eight rebounds and six assists, and Chet Holmgren added 14 points, seven assists and four blocks for the Thunder, who entered the night with the league's fourth-best record.

Kristaps Porzingis scored 34 points and Jayson Tatum had 30 for the Celtics, who had won six straight and 11 of 12.

Oklahoma City has won eight of nine. During that stretch, the Thunder have beaten defending champion Denver twice, ended the Los Angeles Clippers win streak at nine, beaten Minnesota—the top team in the West—by 23, and now topped the Celtics.

## 76ERS 110, BULLS 97

**PHILADELPHIA** (AP)—Joel Embiid had 31 points, 15 rebounds and 10 assists in his return from a sprained right ankle, Tyrese Maxey scored 21 points and Philadelphia beat Chicago.

Embiid missed all four games on the 76ers' holiday road trip, and they went 2-2. One of those games was in Chicago just three nights earlier, a 105-92 loss in which the Sixers never led in the second half.

Embiid is the reigning NBA MVP for a reason. With the big man back, the Sixers turned this into an early blowout against a Bulls team that had played well recently without injured guard Zach LaVine. LaVine can return to the lineup as early as Friday. Even the two-time All-Star wouldn't have helped much in this one as the Bulls fell to 10-6 this season without him.

The 76ers raced to a 43-18 lead after one quarter, with the Bulls missing all 10 3-pointers.

DeMar DeRozan led the Bulls with 16 points. Andre Drummond had 11 points, 17 rebounds and muffed a dunk to the delight of the home crowd when he was stuffed by the front of the rim. Forward Patrick Williams left with an injured right ankle.

## WARRIORS 121, MAGIC 115

**SAN FRANCISCO** (AP)—Stephen Curry scored 36 points and delivered on key plays in the fourth quarter to help Golden State snap a three-game losing streak with a victory over Orlando.

Curry scored or set up 13 straight Warriors points in a four-minute stretch late in the fourth quarter that gave Golden State its first win in three tries on a season-high, seven-game homestand.

Jonathan Kuminga added 19 points and Klay Thompson scored 15 for the Warriors.

Paolo Banchero and 27 points and 12 rebounds for Orlando, while Franz Wagner added 25 points. The Magic have lost their first two games on a four-game road trip.

## HORNETS 111, KINGS 104

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.** (AP)—Terry Rozier scored 14 of his 34 points in the fourth quarter after missing a game due to illness, and Charlotte beat Sacramento to snap an 11-game losing streak.

Rozier added six assists and Charlotte outscored Sacramento 36-26 in the final period, finishing the game on a 10-0 run. Miles Bridges had 27 points and P.J. Washington added 17.

De'Aaron Fox led the Kings with 30 points, including 12 in the fourth quarter. Domantas Sabonis had 23 points and 19 rebounds for his 15th straight double-double, tied for the longest streak in the NBA this season.

Sabonis also committed 11 turnovers, contributing to Sacramento's season-high 21.

## PELICANS 112, NETS 85

**NEW ORLEANS** (AP)—CJ McCollum scored 16 points, Herb Jones added 14 and New Orleans routed Brooklyn for its third straight victory and eighth in 11 games.

Jose Alvarado scored 13 points and Jonas Valanciunas had 11 points and 12 rebounds for New Orleans, which opened the game on a 9-0 run, never trailed and led by as many as 32 points.

It was the fewest points the Nets have scored this season and fewest the Pelicans have allowed.

The Nets shot a season-worst 35.7% (35 for 98) while losing their fourth straight. Brooklyn's Cam Thomas, who entered the game averaging a team-leading 22.4 points per game, missed all 11 of his shots and did not score. Thomas, Spencer Dinwiddie (0 for 6) and Royce O'Neale combined to go 0 for 23. Brooklyn attempted 43 3-pointers, missing 32.

# In an era when home court means less and less, Celtics are 16-0 at TD Garden

By NOAH TRISTER
AP SPORTS WRITER

When the Boston Celtics were winning championships with Larry Bird and Kevin McHale in the 1980s, they were notoriously tough to beat at home. The old Boston Garden could be oppressively hot, and a rowdy home crowd added another obstacle.

Buildings in the NBA aren't like that anymore, but the current Celtics are on their own impressive run at home.

Boston is 16-0 at TD Garden. With its corporate name and modern feel, that arena doesn't have the mystique of the old Garden, but it does house a fine basketball team that is trying to leave its own mark on Celtics history.

"We got the best fans in the league," guard Derrick White said last month when asked about receiving "MVP" chants. "I know I'm not the MVP, but it's always cool to hear."

Forgive Boston fans for getting a little carried away. At home at least, the Celtics look worthy of quite a few honors.

Amazingly, Boston's perfect home record nearly ended last week against a team trying to halt an even longer streak. The Detroit Pistons took a 21-point lead in the second quarter before the Celtics came all the way back to win 128-122 in overtime on Thursday night. It was a record-tying 28th straight loss for the Pistons, and Boston would have been a most unlikely place for them to finally win.

Detroit did end the streak two nights later at home against Toronto. That was a night after the Celtics had also defeated Toronto at home, again barely keeping their streak alive with a 120-118 victory. Boston's next home game is Friday against Utah. Minnesota, in town next week, could provide a significant test.

What's interesting about this run by the Celtics is that overall, home-court advantage isn't nearly what it used to be in the NBA. Last season, the home team won 58% of the time in the regular season. That number is around the same this season. Back in the late 80s, that figure was north of 65%. In the 1950-51 season, it was 74%.

In some ways, the Celtics themselves have reflected the overall state of home-court advantage in the NBA. In 1954-55—when home court was a huge deal—Boston went 21-5 at home and 4-22 on the road.

In 1985-86, the Celtics set a record by going 40-1 at home. Then they went 10-0 at home in the playoffs en route to the championship.

Nowadays, nobody feels that unbeatable at home. Even Denver, with its difficult altitude, lost seven home games during the regular season in 2022-23, then another in the postseason on its way to the title. Whether it's because of more comfortable travel, less intimidating venues or other reasons, winning on the road is a good bit more common now.

That's not to say nobody can put up a dominant home record anymore. San Antonio matched Boston's record by going 40-1 in 2015-16, losing only to Golden State in its next-to-last home game—a victory the Warriors needed while closing in on the all-time wins record of 73.

Of course, those Spurs then dropped two of their three home games during a second-round playoff loss to Oklahoma City.

There are signs that home-court advantage isn't as big a factor anymore in the postseason either.

From 1983-94, home teams were undefeated in Game 7s. And after Washington beat Seattle in 1978, no road team won Game 7 of the NBA Finals until LeBron James and Cleveland did it at Golden State in 2016.

These days, however, home court assures nothing in a Game 7. Last season, two road teams won in that scenario—Golden State at Sacramento and Miami at Boston. That was, remarkably, the fourth time in the past two decades that the Celtics have dropped a Game 7 at home. It also happened in 2005 against Indiana, 2009 against Orlando and 2018 against Cleveland.

In that span, no other team has lost more than two Game 7s at home.

So Boston's dominance at TD Garden is noteworthy, but the Celtics know as much as anyone that they can't take it for granted when they start the postseason.

# Falling short in playoffs won't cut it for Lamar Jackson and Ravens

By ROB MAADDI
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

AP

Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson (8) celebrates with Patrick Ricard after their tocudhown against the Miami Dolphins during the second half of an NFL football game in Baltimore, Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023.

Lamar Jackson and the Baltimore Ravens played their best football in the biggest games of the regular season.

Now, they've got to do it in the playoffs.

Jackson has been one of the NFL's top players for several years, but the Ravens are just 1-3 in the playoffs with him.

This season seems different. The Ravens have not only beaten the better teams, they've dominated them.

Jackson boosted his chances for his second AP NFL MVP award with back-to-back sensational performances in lopsided wins over the 49ers (12-4) and Dolphins (11-5) to help the Ravens (13-3) secure the AFC's No. 1 seed.

He threw for 573 yards and seven touchdowns with a 145.3 passer rating and ran for 80 yards in the two games as the Ravens outscored both teams 89-38.

In five games this season against teams that currently have 11 wins, Jackson has completed 90 of 125 passes (72%) for 1,339 yards, 13 TDs and two picks with a 134.7 passer rating. The Ravens were 4-1 in those games with average margin of victory of 27 points and each win by at least 14.

Overall, Jackson has a career-high 3,678 yards passing with 24 TDs, seven interceptions and a 102.7 passer rating. He's also run for 821 yards and five scores. He had 36 TD passes, 1,206 yards rushing and seven TDs on the ground in 2019 when he was the NFL MVP.

But the Ravens were knocked out of the playoffs in the divisional round after earning the top seed that season.

That won't cut it this time.

"We gotta finish the season the right way," Jackson said.

## WOUNDED BIRDS

That 10-1 start for the Philadelphia Eagles is a distant memory.

Four losses in the past five games knocked the Eagles out of the running for the NFC's No. 1 seed and likely into a wild-card spot. Blowing a 21-6 halftime lead in a 35-31 loss to lowly Arizona cost Philly control of the NFC East and now the Eagles need Dallas to lose to Washington to have a shot at winning the division.

Fans are calling for coach Nick Sirianni's job, even though he's 34-16 with three playoff appearances, including a Super Bowl trip, in three seasons.

They've wanted offensive coordinator Brian Johnson fired for a while. First-year defensive coordinator Sean Desai already lost play-calling duties to Matt Patricia.

A.J. Brown is not happy with the offensive play-calling and refusing to talk to reporters to avoid criticizing coaches. Anonymous players have questioned Jalen Hurts' leadership.

Things most definitely aren't sunny in Philadelphia.

"We're all frustrated," Sirianni said.

Despite their troubles, the Eagles are capable of going on a run. They beat Dallas, Miami, Buffalo and Kansas City this season before losing to the 49ers, Cowboys, Seahawks and Cardinals. If they somehow get back on track, they'll be a tough out in the playoffs.

## WINNING THE SOUTH

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers blew their first chance to clinch a third straight NFC South title. A four-game losing streak prevented the Jacksonville Jaguars from securing a second consecutive AFC South title until Week 18.

Both teams are in excellent position to do it this week. The Buccaneers (8-8) visit the woeful Carolina Panthers (2-14). The Jaguars are on the road at Tennessee (5-11).

If the Buccaneers stumble, the Falcons-Saints winner takes the division. If the Jaguars slip up, the Texans-Colts winner takes the crown.

The teams that come out of the South in both conferences could be home underdogs in the wild-card round.

The AFC South winner will host the Cleveland Browns (11-5). The NFC South winner will host either the Eagles or Cowboys.

## ONE YEAR LATER

On Jan. 2, 2023, Bills safety Damar Hamlin collapsed on the field and needed to be resuscitated after undergoing a cardiac arrest. Hamlin made a remarkable recovery and has played in five games this season.

The NFL and other major sports leagues and leading health advocacy organizations launched the Smart Heart Sports Coalition in March 2023 in response to Hamlin's cardiac arrest. The coalition's goal is for every state across the country to adopt life-saving policies that will prevent fatalities from sudden cardiac arrest among high school athletes and others.

Those policies are:

■ An Emergency Action Plan for each high school athletic venue that are widely distributed, posted, rehearsed, and updated annually.

■ Clearly marked automated external defibrillator (AEDs) at each athletic venue or within 1-3 minutes of each venue where high school practices or competitions are held.

■ CPR and AED education for coaches.

Since the coalition's work began, five states have moved to enact one or more of the policies, including New Mexico, Kentucky, Indiana, Louisiana and California.

# Big-picture answers figure to come soon after Bears wrap up season at Green Bay

**LAKE FOREST, Ill.** (AP)—The big-picture questions for the Chicago Bears will start to be addressed soon. Coach Matt Eberflus just isn't ready to discuss them yet.

With one game remaining, Eberflus deflected questions this week about quarterback Justin Fields' future as well as his own and offensive coordinator Luke Getsy's. He wouldn't say if he would continue to call defensive plays—duties he took on when defensive coordinator Alan Williams resigned early in the season—assuming he continues as the Bears' coach.

Chicago has huge decisions awaiting since it owns the No. 1 pick in next year's NFL draft, thanks to a trade with league-worst Carolina. But Eberflus insisted his focus was on the season finale at Green Bay on Sunday.

"We'll talk about all those big-picture questions after the season, with (general manager) Ryan (Poles) and myself and we'll see where it goes from there," he said when asked about Fields. "But we love where his progress is. He's been more consistent."

Eberflus gave similar responses when asked about his status and Getsy's.

The Bears (7-9), meanwhile, are in a far better spot than they were after they lost to Green Bay in the season opener at Soldier Field.

They've won five of seven after rolling past Atlanta 37-17 on Sunday, with a revamped defense playing at a high level and Fields looking more comfortable.

There's a different vibe in Chicago. And potentially helping spoil the Packers' playoff hopes would be a sweet finish to a season that started on a sour note.

"Just the way we're going," running back Khalil Herbert said. "Trending upwards. Guys bringing the energy every day. Winning's hard to get in the NFL so you've got to celebrate every one."

Eberflus insisted he will treat the finale like any other game and that anyone who is healthy will play. He said he won't harp on the possibility of keeping the Packers out of the postseason.

"I'm just going to keep it about us, about our execution, the men in that locker room playing together, playing for each other, the brotherhood we have and about us playing with the right passion and emotion that it takes to win a football game," he said.

## WHAT'S WORKING

The passing game. Poles might have an easier decision on his hands had Fields delivered a few more performances like he did on Sunday.

Fields bounced back from a less-than-inspiring outing the previous week in a win over Arizona with arguably his most complete performance of the season. He threw for 268 yards with a touchdown pass and a rushing TD in what might have been his final home game as a Bear.

Fields even had fans chanting "We want Fields!" The question is whether Poles feels the same way.

The Bears own the No. 1 pick thanks to the trade with Carolina last March in which they also acquired receiver DJ Moore. And if they decide to go with Caleb Williams or Drake Maye, Fields would likely be traded.

Salary cap management might also come into play, with the chance to have a QB on a rookie deal for the next five years. Fields is completing his third season, and the Bears have to decide whether to pick up his fifth-year option for 2025.

## WHAT NEEDS HELP

Though the Bears played one of their most complete games of the season, penalties were an issue. They committed five for 55 yards, while Atlanta had just one 15-yarder.

## STOCK UP

Herbert. He set a season high for the second straight week, running for 124 yards and a score after rushing for 112 in a win over Arizona. Herbert had been limited to 75 yards on 31 attempts over the previous four games. He missed five prior to that because of an ankle injury.

## STOCK DOWN

RB D'Onta Foreman. The veteran has performed well enough when called upon, but was a healthy scratch. Foreman has 425 yards rushing after running for 914 with Carolina last season.

## INJURIES

CB Jaylon Johnson (shoulder) left the game after he was hurt making a tackle on Bijan Robinson late in the second quarter.

## KEY NUMBERS

5 – The Bears won their final five home games after losing 10 straight at Soldier Field, including the first three this year.

400 – The Bears finished with 432 yards of offense against Atlanta after gaining 420 against Arizona. Their only other 400-yard games were in Weeks 4 and 5, when they put up 471 in a loss to Denver and 451 in a win at Washington.

## NEXT STEPS

Win or lose against the Packers, the Bears face an intriguing offseason.

# Yamamoto's contract with Dodgers includes 2 opt outs

## » But timing depends on elbow health

AP

Yoshinobu Yamamoto poses wearing his No. 18 Dodgers baseball jersey during a media presentation, in Los Angeles, Dec. 27, 2023.

NEW YORK (AP)—Yoshinobu Yamamoto will have two opportunities to opt out of his record $325 million, 12-year contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers, although the timing is tied to his pitching elbow's health.

If Yamamoto has Tommy John surgery or is on the injured list for a right elbow injury for 134 consecutive service days from 2024-29, he would have the right to opt out after the 2031 and 2033 World Series, according to terms of the deal obtained by The Associated Press on Tuesday.

If he avoids Tommy John surgery and doesn't miss that much time with an elbow issue during that window, he can instead opt out after the 2029 and 2031 World Series.

In the first scenario, the Dodgers also would gain a $10 million conditional option for 2036 with no buyout.

Yamamoto does not have the right to block trades but could opt out of the contract after the end of any season in which he is traded.

Los Angeles announced the agreement two weeks after signing two-way star Shohei Ohtani to a record $700 million, 10-year contract.

Yamamoto has salaries of $5 million this year, $10 million in 2025 and $12 million in 2026, according to the deal announced Dec. 27. He gets $26 million each in 2027, 2028 and 2029, $29 million in each of the following two seasons and $28 million from 2032-35.

As part of the deal under the posting system between Major League Baseball and Nippon Professional Baseball, the Dodgers will pay a posting fee of $50,625,000 to the Orix Buffaloes of Japan's Pacific League, raising the cost of Yamamoto to the team to just over $375 million. Yamamoto will get $20 million of his $50 million signing bonus by Feb. 1 and the remainder by July 1.

If he is traded after a World Series, he would have the right to opt out in the subsequent offseason.

His contract includes a full-time interpreter, personal trainer and physical therapist. Yamamoto gets a hotel suite on road trips and five roundtrip airline tickets each year.

He cannot be assigned to the minor leagues without his consent.

Yamamoto's contract is for $1 million more than Gerrit Cole's $324 million, nine-year contract with the New York Yankees from 2020-28. It is the longest deal for a pitcher, topping Wayne Garland's $2.3 million, 10-year agreement with Cleveland in November 1976 as part of the first free-agent class.

The Yankees proposed a $300 million, 10-year contract but would not go any longer, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the offers were not publicly announced.

Los Angeles has been baseball's biggest spender this offseason, committing $1,212,187,500 to Ohtani, Yamamoto and pitcher Tyler Glasnow, who agreed to a $136,562,500, five-year contract as part of his trade from the Tampa Bay Rays.

Yamamoto was 16-6 with a 1.21 ERA last season, striking out 169 and walking 28 in 164 innings. He was 70-29 with a 1.82 ERA in seven seasons with the Buffaloes. Yamamoto struck out a Japan Series-record 14 in a Game 6 win over Hanshin on Nov. 5, throwing a 138-pitch complete game. Orix went on to lose Game 7.

Yamamoto pitched his second career no-hitter, the 100th in Japanese big league history, on Sept. 9 for the Buffaloes against the Lotte Marines. A two-time Pacific League MVP, Yamamoto also threw a no-hitter against the Seibu Lions on June 18 last year.

Under the MLB-NPB agreement, the posting fee will be 20% of the first $25 million of a major league contract, including earned bonuses and options. The percentage drops to 17.5% of the next $25 million and 15% of any amount over $50 million. There would be a supplemental fee of 15% of any earned bonuses, salary escalators and exercised options.

## Montas, Reds finalize $16M, 1-year contract

**CINCINNATI** (AP)—The Reds finalized their $16 million, one-year contract with right-hander Frankie Montas on Tuesday, another free-agent addition to shore up their pitching staff.

Montas gets $14 million this year, and the deal includes a $20 million mutual option for 2025 and a $2 million buyout.

Montas was acquired by the Yankees from Oakland with reliever Lou Trivino on Aug. 1, 2022, for four prospects. Montas went 1-3 with a 6.35 ERA in eight starts with New York that year, later admitting he wasn't healthy.

He had labrum surgery last Feb. 21 and made his only big league appearance of the year on Sept. 30.

The 30-year-old Montas is 37-35 with a 3.90 ERA in 99 starts and 31 relief appearances for the Chicago White Sox (2015), Oakland (2017-22) and the Yankees.

"We are excited to add a pitcher of Frankie's caliber to our staff," Reds president of baseball operations Nick Krall said. "We are confident he will return to the form that made him one of baseball's best pitchers before he suffered the shoulder injury."

In his best season in 2021. Montas went 13-9 with a 3.37 ERA and 207 strikeouts in 187 innings.

He is expected to join a rotation mix that includes last season's top three starters Hunter Greene, Nick Lodolo and Graham Ashcraft.

Cincinnati previously signed a pair of free agent pitcher, giving Nick Martinez a $24 million, two-year contract and Emilio Pagán a $16 million, two-year deal. The Reds re-signed Buck Farmer with a $2.25 million, a one-year contract and gave third baseman Jeimer Candelario a $45 million, three-year contract.

To make room on the roster for Montas, the Reds designated catcher Austin Wynns for assignment.

## RUN

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Grotto 10K on June 1, which will start at the Grotto in an out and back in semi-flat course.

July will see the 4th Annual Latte Built Independence Day 2-Miler on July 4, which will be from the Garapan Fishing Base to National Office Supply and back.

Next, instead of the Run Saipan Half Marathon in December, it will be on Aug. 30. Before that, there will be the 3rd Annual Beer Mile on Aug. 2, which coincides with International Beer Day and will be held at the Saipan Vegas Resort golf course.

For Oct. 19, there will be the Splash and Dash on a new course at American Memorial Park and Micro Beach.

The month of November will see the 3rd Annual Saipan International Airport 8K Trail Run and the Veterans Day 5K on Nov. 11.

The last month of the year will end with a bang with the 4th Annual Run from '24 1 Mile Road Race on Dec. 31.

Officially founded in 2020 by president Edward Dela Cruz Jr., Run Saipan was established as a nonprofit organization in 2021.

Run Saipan seeks to promote a healthy lifestyle in the CNMI by supporting community projects such as regular 5K races, running and nutrition workshops, sending athletic ambassadors to the schools, and working with Northern Marianas Athletics to increase the opportunities for cardiovascular health available to all residents in the Commonwealth, regardless of running ability or experience.

Dela Cruz thanked Dr. Ron Snyder for the website—a three-year project. "It's really beautiful so all the credit goes to Dr. Ron for this. This makes things a lot easier, especially having our online calendar and everything one year out... So, if anyone wants to know about any events with Run Saipan and Northern Marianas Athletics, they can go to our calendar page https://www.runsaipan.com/2024-calendar."

## NMSA

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■ Must have resided in the CNMI for a minimum of 10 years;

■ Athletes and officials must have been active a minimum of 10 years in their sport and have reached the age of 35. Coaches and administrators must have been active a minimum of 10 years and have reached the age of 35;

■ Can be nominated by a national federation, which must be an active NMSA member with annual dues paid up to date, by any citizen of the CNMI, or by the Special Hall of Fame Committee, which is appointed by the NMSA board of directors;

■ An individual can only be inducted into the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame one time. However, their record may be updated to reflect more recent accomplishments;

■ Inductees do not have to be present at the awards ceremony. Those who are chosen and do not attend the induction ceremonies may have a relative or designated individual stand in his or her place.

■ An inductee who is deceased may have a relative or designated individual stand in his or her place.

For selection, nominees must get the 2/3 vote of the NMSA General Membership to be inducted into the Hall of Fame; Selection is in accordance with the following:

■ Only a maximum of 4 inductees may be inducted in any given year;

■ A maximum of three athletes may be inducted into the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame in any year. If three athletes are inducted into the Hall, two males and 1 female or 1 male and two females will make up the genders of the inductees. If two athletes are inducted into the Hall, both may be of the same gender;

■ Only one administrator, one coach, or one official may be inducted into the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame in a given year;

■ Induction in the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame is to be at the annual NMSA Sports Banquet unless otherwise approved by the NMSA board.

The deadline for nominations is due on or before Jan. 31, 2024. Send nominations via email at marianassports@gmail.com.

Winners will be awarded at the NMSA Annual Awards Banquet, which will be scheduled in the first quarter of 2024.

For 2022, the Athletes of the Year were Tania Tan, Colin Sinclair, Raymond Santos, Jason Limes, Angel San Nicolas, David Barnhouse, and Joey Colisao.

The 2022 Hall of Fame inductee was Manny Sablan; Coach of the Year was Jeff Race, Labausa, and Barnhouse.

As for 2022 Administrator of the Year, instead of just one, all nine sports federations that medaled in the 2022 Northern Marianas Pacific Mini Games were recognized as Administrators of the Year.

They are the Northern Marianas Athletics, Northern Marianas Badminton Association, Saipan Baseball League, Northern Mariana Islands Volleyball Association, Commonwealth Federation of Golf Associations, Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association, Triathlon Association of the CNMI, Northern Marianas National Paddle Sports Association, and CNMI Weightlifting Federation.

## HEAVEN

*From page 20*

Their strategy, Quan said, was "keeping it consistent and trying to minimize the errors. Talk a lot—we notice when we are talking more, we play a lot looser and it just flows a little bit better."

She added that it's her first time playing in the tourney and thanked tournament coordinator En Yang Pang and Agape Christian School for organizing it.

Pang said the tourney and turnout was great. He said, "I can definitely see the growth in volleyball on our island, because now there are a lot more people who are interested in playing. The open gym is a testament to that. Every week, there's like, at least 50 people coming out to play and that showed in the number of teams that we had. This year, there was a record turnout—12 men's teams and eight women's teams."

He said he was "very impressed" with the women's teams' turnout and with the amount of spectators that came out every night to watch the games.

Pang then thanked the sponsors of the tourney Fishing Tackle & Sporting Goods, All Star Sporting Goods, and MarPac.

**Morant scores 26 points as Grizzlies pull away from Spurs.**

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Saipan Tribune
# Sports

**Yamamoto's contract with Dodgers includes 2 opt outs.**

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# Heaven on Earth reign in women's division

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Heaven on Earth claimed the women's division championship of the 5th Annual Agape Christmas Volleyball Tournament last Friday at the Agape Gymnasium.

Coming out of volleyball retirement and from the soccer pitch to the volleyball courts, the Heaven on Earth team captained by Michelle Masga, along with Somia Quan, Charnessa Lizama, Toni Kasilyn Olopai, Moriah Sablan, Kathy Winkfield, Jhaneeka Atalig, Jaime Camacho, and Jan Travilla reigned in the women's division to win the championship against Grinch Gang, 25-15, 25-23.

Young volleyball players including captain Aiko Rasiang, and Nichiko Rasiang, Veralei Hapdei, Vinalei Hapdei, Jovinia Moses, Deivalyn Ham, Direnalyn Castro, Katriel Saures, Jen Savellano, and Azriel Fatialofa made up the Grinch Gang and put up a great fight against the much more experienced Heaven on Earth team.

Heaven on Earth gave Grinch Gang hell as they went down to business from the first set, shutting down any rebuttal that they had. It was a quick first set as Grinch Gang could not get past Heaven on Earth's reinforcements.

Grinch Gang put up a better fight in the second set and tried to make a push for a tie-breaker, but came up just short. Heaven on Earth's serves and kills halted Grinch Gang in their tracks to scoop the win in just two sets.

Heaven on Earth bested seven other teams in the tourney that started last Dec. 16. In the semis, they defeated Volleyholics, 25-12, 25-14 last Dec. 28.

Quan said after the awards ceremony that the tourney for them was tough at first, but "the more we played with each other, the better we got, the more we improved. We were kind of just tracking higher and higher so to end with the championship, it was very surprising, but also very rewarding."

Their team played against a much younger Grinch Gang in the finals and Quan said that they played really well and to end up in the finals with them was a good matchup.

*See HEAVEN on Page 19*

LEIGH GASES

Some members of the Heaven on Earth women's volleyball team pose with their championship trophy after the awards ceremony of the 5th Annual Agape Christmas Volleyball Tournament last Friday at the Agape Gymnasium.

# NMSA seeks 2023 'Of the Year' nominations

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

It's almost that time of the year again when CNMI athletes are recognized for a year's worth of accomplishments in their respective sport.

The Northern Marianas Sports Association is seeking nominations for the 2023 Coach of the Year, 2023 Administrator of the Year, and CNMI Sports Hall of Fame Class of 2023.

For Coach of the Year and Administrator of the Year, the sport's national federation president must sign and submit the nomination letter and also submit the nominee's bio/accomplishment highlights for 2023.

For Hall of Fame nominees, a nomination letter signed by the individual or representative of the group must be submitted, along with the bio/accomplishment highlights throughout the years for the nominees.

Induction into the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame is limited to individual athletes,coaches, administrators or officials, provided they meet the following criteria:

■ Must be a U.S. citizen or have achieved distinction as a CNMI representative;

*See NMSA on Page 19*

LEIGH GASES

2022 Athletes of the Year pose with Northern Marianas Sports Association board members during the NMSA Awards Banquet last year at the Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan

# Run Saipan website, 2024 race calendar unveiled

LEIGH GASES

Participants of the Run from '23 Mile Race take a traditional jumping photo at the finish line of the new course at the Smiling Cove Marina on New Year's Eve last Sunday.

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

Saipan's premier running club, Run Saipan, has a new and convenient website, www.runsaipan.com for all the information you need about their races.

Their 2024 race calendar is also available on their website.

First up in another year-long calendar of events is the return of their three-day race—Run Saipan Trinity 2023—from Saturday, Jan. 13, through Monday, Jan. 15. The series will encompass a 10K on the Beach Road Pathway, a 5K up Mt. Tapochao, and a 5K in Marpi in the span of three days. Runners can choose not to run on all race days and will receive an event medal for each race joined. A commemoration medal will be given to those who complete all three races.

Next up on Feb. 10 is the 4th Annual Marianas Ekiden which is a 21-kilometer relay split between teams of four runners each.

In the month of March there will be the 4th Annual Mangrove 5K on March 2. It's free for Run Saipan members.

On April 26 is the 3rd Annual CHCC Happy Hearts 5K, which will be from the Garapan Fishing Base where participants will head south to just past the Japanese Tank Memorial along Quartermaster Road and back.

May brings the ever-popular Star Wars Day Race "May the 4th" on May 4.

The beginning of summer is marked by the 3rd Annual

*See RUN on Page 19*